

HIGH SCHOOL PREVIEW

Baseball America

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L.A. KINGS

**TOP 100
PROSPECTS**

**SPLIT
DECISIONS:**
HOW THE
RANKINGS
SHOOK OUT

FUTILE FOUR:
CLUBS WITH
NO TOP 100
PLAYERS

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NEXT ISSUE

It's time to start looking toward the season with the first part of our Major League Preview. We'll look at the future of daily fantasy games (and whether they have one). We'll also have BA staff predictions for how the season will unfold, as well as Ben Badler's reports on prospect showcases in the Dominican Republic.



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PAGE 31



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Vol. 36, No. 6

COVER PHOTOS: JOHN WILLIAMSON

FROM THE archives

MARCH 10
2008

» IN THIS ISSUE: Yankees and Red Sox righthanders Joba Chamberlain and Clay Buchholz highlight this year's Top 100 list.

» ALSO: Eric Hosmer, Sonny Gray and Gerrit Cole dot our High School All-America roster.

In a Split Decision on the futures of Clay Buchholz and Joba Chamberlain . . .

JIM CALLIS WRITES: In terms of pure stuff, I think Buchholz' curveball and changeup are right up there with Chamberlain's fastball and slider. I'd love to have either of those guys, but I'd take Buchholz for two reasons. One, his plus fastball and occasional plus slider give him a deeper repertoire. And two, given their pasts and builds, I think Buchholz is a better bet to stay healthy over the long haul.

CHRIS KLINE WROTE: They're both fearless, but Chamberlain pitches off his fastball more consistently. And not that Buchholz is some soft-tosser, but when I think of an elite pitcher who will come right after hitters with pure power, it's Chamberlain. And for as good as Buchholz' secondary stuff is, Chamberlain's arsenal of secondary pitches seems a little underrated to me.

WILL LINGO WROTE: I think given Chamberlain's build, durability questions, and overwhelming success out of the bullpen, it's going to be mighty tempting for the Yankees to make him Mariano Rivera's successor. I know they're talking about moving him to the rotation at midseason, but Jonathan Papelbon was a starter at this time last year, too.

Gurriel brothers leave Cuba to seek MLB deals

BY JOHN MANUEL

Yulieski Gurriel, long considered both the best major league prospect and the best player in Cuba, has left the island with his brother Lourdes Jr., also a strong MLB prospect in his own right.

Baseball America's Ben Badler confirmed an El Nuevo Herald report on the Gurriels on Feb. 8 that the brothers have left the island, intending to establish residency elsewhere and become free agents. Both players have changed the spellings of their names recently; it's been Gourriel in the past.

Yulieski, 31, was hitting .494/.586/.861 in 215 plate appearances during the 2015-2016 season in Cuba's Serie Nacional, with 14 home runs, 37 walks and two strikeouts prior to joining Cuba's team for the Caribbean Series. He went 9-for-20 in five Caribbean Series games while playing second base and third base for Cuba, which went just 1-4.

Lourdes Jr., a 22-year-old who turns 23 in October, went 2-for-11 in the Series with four strikeouts in 11 at-bats, but also ranks as one of the top prospects in Cuba. He was hitting .340/.400/.561 with 10 home runs in 237 plate appearances.

The Gurriel brothers play for Industriales in Cuba, with Yulieski manning third base while Lourdes, whose tools fit in the infield, usually plays left field for both Industriales and the Cuban national team. They have long track records but have been seen regularly in recent years in top international competitions, such as the last two Caribbean Series and November's Premier 12 tournament.

Yulieski has shown increased intensity in international play in that period as more and more Cubans have found fame and fortune in MLB. With his father Lourdes Sr. being a member of the Cuban Communist party and a national hero from his own time as a player on the national team, Yulieski had been seen as forbidden fruit by many scouts who thought he would never leave Cuba.

Now that he has, he's expected to set off a significant bidding war as soon as he becomes



Yulieski Gurriel

BILL NICIOLIS

eligible to sign, as he's not subject to international bonus pools. Gurriel, a listed 6-foot, 195 pounds, has lightning-fast hands and classic third base tools with arm strength, body control and plus power. He has played professionally before in Japan but did not report in 2015 to play for the Yokohama DeNa BayStars. He played for the BayStars in 2014 for 62 games, hitting .305/.349/.536 with 22 doubles and 11 home runs in 258 plate appearances.

Speculation about how much the elder Gurriel would sign for would be premature; he's a better player than Hector Olivera, who signed in 2015 on a six-year, \$62.5 million contract with a \$28 million bonus.

Lourdes Jr., who would be subject to the bonus pools until he turns 23 in the fall, has shown above-average speed and defensive ability in the outfield, and scouts would like to see him give infield a try. The 6-foot-3, 185-pounder has long arms and some holes in his swing as a result but also has shown above-average power potential.

With the Gurriel brothers defecting following Jose Fernandez's departure in December, the Nos. 1, 3 and 4 players on the island have left in the past three months. **For more on the Gurriels, see page 30.**

ASK BA

BY J.J. COOPER

Who Just Missed?

So we now know who made the Top 100 Prospects list, but who just missed?

EVERYONE, EVERY YEAR

Yes, this is the one time each year that we know we'll receive this question for Ask BA. We know as soon as you get the Top 100 Prospects list in your hand, you'll be wondering who just missed the list.

This year the just-missed list is a little longer and meatier than usual because the back of this year's list was even more wide open—with more varied opinions—than usual.

A little insight to the process: We get the Baseball America staff to rank their Top 150 Prospects, and we put those lists into a spreadsheet to see if we can find a consensus. Once we have that list, we sit down and mull over the adjustments.

In some order, the next 20 who just missed the Top 100 were Alex Jackson, Archie Bradley, Byung Ho Park, Chance Sisco, Duane Underwood, Dylan Bundy, Frankie Montas, Garrett Whitley, Hunter Harvey, James Kaprielian, Jameson Taillon, Jorge Alfaro, Josh Naylor, Kyle Freeland, Mark Appel, Matt Chapman, Reese McGuire, Spencer Adams, Tim Cooney, Tyler Kolek and Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

In our discussions Sisco, Harvey, Taillon, Whitley and Bradley all came the closest to making the list.

Andrew Knapp (No. 96) was the last player to place on all six ballots.

There were 208 players who landed somewhere on at least one ballot, including:

A.J. Cole, Albert Almora, Alen Hanson, Alex Blandino, Andrew Velazquez, Antonio Senzatela, Aramis Garcia, Ashe Russell, Austin Barnes, Austin Riley, Beau Burrows, Billy McKinney, Brandon Nimmo, Brian Johnson, Bubba Starling, Casey Gillaspie, Chad Pinder, Chris Shaw, Christin Stewart, Clint Coulter, Cole Tucker, Colin Moran, Conner Greene, Dan Vogelbach, Daniel Robertson, Derek Fisher, Deven Marrero, Domingo Acevedo, Drew Jackson, Dylan Cease, Edwin Diaz, Forrest Wall, Franklyn Kilome, Gavin Cecchini, Gilbert Lara, Jack Flaherty, Jacob Faria, Jacob Nottingham, John Lamb, Jomar Reyes, Jon Harris, Jordan Patterson, Josh Hader, Ke'Bryan Hayes, Keury Mella, Kevin Newman, Kodi Medeiros, Lucas Sims, Lucius Fox, Luke Weaver, Mallex Smith, Marco Gonzales, Matt Duffy, Matt Olson, Max Fried, Micah Johnson, Michael Feliz, Miguel Almonte, Mike Gerber, Mikie Mahtook, Nick Travieso, Oscar de la Cruz, Phillip Ervin, Raimel Tapia, Ramon Flores, Renato Nunez, Richard Urena, Richie Martin, Rob Refsnyder, Roman Quinn, Ronald Acuna, Rowdy Tellez, Ruddy Giron, Sam Conrod, Sam Travis, Sandy Alcantara, Sean Reid-Foley, Taylor Guerrieri, Taylor Ward, Trayce Thompson, Trevor Story, Trey Mancini, Trey Michalczewski, Tyler Beede, Tyler White, Wilkerman Garcia, Wilmer Difo and Yaisel Sierra.

HOW TO REACH US

MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 12877, Durham, NC 27709.

STREET ADDRESS: 4319 S. Alston Ave. Suite 103, Durham, NC 27713.

E-MAIL ADDRESS: letters@baseballamerica.com.

PHONE: (919) 682-9635; (800) 845-2726 FAX: (919) 682-2880.

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Manfred reflects on initial year challenges



Jerry Crasnick

Baseball Writer,
ESPN.com

PHILADELPHIA

Rob Manfred's legacy as Major League Baseball's 10th commissioner has yet to be defined. But in his first 365 days on the job, he crossed a lot of items off his to-do list.

After an extended run as MLB's chief labor lawyer, Manfred succeeded Bud Selig as commissioner on Jan.

25, 2015. During his rookie year, the Royals won their first title since 1985 with the game's 16th biggest payroll and an emphasis on homegrown talent. It was both a symbolic gesture and a triumph for the concept of parity when Manfred handed the World Series trophy to Royals chairman David Glass on a chilly November night in New York.

That awards ceremony was merely the caper to an eventful spring, summer and fall. During Manfred's inaugural season, MLB cut six minutes from the average game time with the implementation of new pace-of-play rules, and the commissioner dispensed with the most controversial item on his plate when he rejected Pete Rose's bid for reinstatement.

In August, MLB announced a new domestic violence policy, which will serve as a framework as Manfred contemplates discipline for alleged offenders Aroldis Chapman, Yasiel Puig and Jose Reyes. In addition, MLB began looking at ways to ensure fan safety in the aftermath of injuries from foul balls in the stands, and looked at changes to address middle infielder safety after the Pirates' Jung Ho Kang and the Mets' Ruben Tejada suffered serious injuries on aggressive takeout slides.

It was a head-spinning and educational 365 days in the life of Rob Manfred. But in the final accounting, the drama revolves less around where he's been than where he and the game are going.

Stirring The Pot

Manfred provided some clues on his approach to media and public relations shortly before taking over for Selig. In an interview with ESPN last January, he engaged in a hypothetical discussion about big-picture changes that might improve the game, and he tossed out the idea of eliminating defensive shifts to generate more offense. Naturally, the headlines weeded out the subtleties and blared, "Manfred wants to get rid of shifts."

Fittingly enough, Manfred stepped into a similar trap at the MLB owners meetings in Coral Gables, Fla., in January, when he said some NL teams are more open-minded about

the designated hitter rule than they were 10 or 20 years ago. One thing led to another, and several media outlets reported that the NL might be ready to adopt the DH as early as 2017. Within days, Manfred was back making the rounds and putting the toothpaste back in the tube.

"The most likely result on the designated hitter for the foreseeable is the status quo," Manfred said after the meetings. "I think the vast majority of clubs in the National League want to stay where they are."

Call it a misstep, if you will. In the grand scheme of things, Manfred understands it's a good thing for people to be discussing baseball in the dead of winter. As long as they're not debating the ravages of PED use, what's the downside?

Man Of The People

This willingness to engage on so many topics is a reflection of Manfred's style. Selig, for most of his 22 years as commissioner, was a master at working the phones and schmoozing owners to build consensus. Manfred, in contrast, prefers a model of open debate and dialogue. He's more willing to jump into the fray than his predecessor, who preferred to dictate the message in more structured settings.

"Bud Selig was magnificent one-on-one. He was very special," said Marc Ganis, president of the Chicago-based sports consulting firm SportsCorp. "But in the last seven years or so, they pretty much kept him away from larger crowds and the national media. Rob is very comfortable interacting with groups large and small. It's less of an imperial commissioner-ship—not that Bud Selig is that way personally—and he's more a man of the people."

People at the low end of the age spectrum rank high on Manfred's priority list. He stressed outreach to America's youth as an early goal, and made a symbolic gesture before the 2015 season opener in Washington when he invited a 9-year-old fan to throw out the ceremonial first pitch at Nationals Park.

"The best part of this job is the access you get to people," Manfred said. "I want to be clear about this: I don't mean that you might get to meet a former president or somebody famous. The best part is, you're out in ballparks and real fans want to engage with you all the time. I especially enjoy when those real fans happen to be of the younger variety."

Moving Forward

Talk to Manfred about the future, and it's full of ideas about ways to expand baseball's horizons and grow the fan base.

On the business side, baseball continues to embrace new technologies and seek inroads into new markets. In August, MLB spun



An openness to new ideas has marked the start of Rob Manfred's time as commissioner

off its technology arm—known as BAM Tech—as an \$8 billion standalone unit. In November, baseball agreed on a three-year deal with Fox that will make in-market games for 15 clubs available via streaming on computers and mobile devices. And shortly after the New Year, MLB struck another deal with Le Sports that will allow 125 games per year to be broadcast in mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau.

Manfred is also bullish on the idea of expansion. While you'll still hear rumblings about Nashville, Portland, Ore., Las Vegas and the usual array of domestic candidates joining the fraternity, MLB is keeping an eye on Mexico City, Montreal and Vancouver, B.C., as potential sites for new teams. Baseball is poised to play spring training games in Cuba and regular-season games in London soon enough.

"I see our business as a growth business," Manfred said. "It's not a this-week or this-year issue. But over the long haul I think we should be looking to expand, and there are international sites that would be intriguing for us."

Manfred's long-term vision for the game is ambitious. His organizational and persuasion skills will be put to the test this year as MLB and the Players Association negotiate a new labor agreement to replace the existing deal, which expires Dec. 1. Can he maintain harmony and the momentum that baseball has generated on its way to becoming a \$9 billion-plus industry?

"I'm a CBA optimist," Manfred said. "We've developed a strong and mature relationship with the MLBPA. I think the players are doing great, and the owners are happy with the economics. I think there's enough money in the game that we can find a way to make a new agreement."

If three decades in the trenches have taught Rob Manfred anything, it's the importance of keeping the game on the field. Negotiating a new labor deal without disruptions won't necessarily make the new commissioner a hero. But it's a nice way to start.

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Indians tab Perez Latin American scouting director

BY BEN BADLER

The Indians have a new top scout in Latin America. Koby Perez, who had been an international crosschecker for the team the last two years, was promoted to director of Latin American scouting, filling the vacancy from the departure of Ramon Pena earlier this month.

Perez has been with the Indians since November 2013, joining the team after spending the previous five years with the Phillies, where he was primarily responsible for scouting in the Dominican Republic.

Perez had been an integral part of Philadelphia's strong run of Dominican signings during that stretch. He was involved in the signings of third baseman Maikel Franco, outfielder Domingo Santana and righthanders Hector Neris and Lisalberto Bonilla, all of whom have reached the major leagues. He was also a signing scout for righthanders Franklyn Kilome and Adonis Medina, who both rank among the Phillies' Top 10 prospects.

"I know I have big shoes to fill replacing Ramon, who I consider one of the best evaluators in the game and a mentor to me, but I'm also appreciative of the opportunity we have to try to replicate as a group some of the success Ramon has had in the past," Perez said.

Prior to working for the Phillies, Perez was a northeast area scout for the Cardinals from 2006-08. During that time, he was the signing scout for big league righthanders Adam Ottavino and Mitch Harris.

Pirates' Brooks To MLB Post

Pirates director of player personnel Tyrone Brooks has left the post to become senior director of MLB's front office and field staff diversity pipeline program.

The program is designed to increase the pool of minority and female candidates for on-field and baseball operations positions.

Major League Baseball also hired Renée Tirado as senior director of recruitment. Tirado had been the head of diversity and inclusion, Americas for AIG.

In a statement MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said: "It is a pleasure to welcome Tyrone Brooks and Renée Tirado to Major League Baseball and we look forward to their contributions. The Diversity Pipeline Program will serve as our game's key initiative towards attracting top talent, hiring qualified candidates and developing careers."

Brooks, 42, got his start as an intern through the Atlanta Braves' career initiatives training program. He joined the Pirates in December 2009 as director of baseball operations. In September, Brooks interviewed with the Brewers for the general manager's job, but the post went to David Stearns.

PERSPECTIVE | Paul Trap

paultrap@BaseballAmerica.com



Vasquez's homer gives Mexico Caribbean title

BY VINCE LARA-CINISOMO

Longtime Mexican slugger Jorge Vasquez has hit close to 200 homers in his Mexican League career, but none as big as the one he hit on Feb. 7.

Vasquez, 33, homered leading off the bottom of the ninth to lead Mexico's Mazatlan Venados to a 5-4 win over Venezuela's Aragua Tigres to win the Caribbean Series championship.

It's the third title in four years for Mexico.

"We never gave up. We always battled to the fullest and kept our heads up, so today we celebrate this crown," Mexico coach Juan Jose Pacheco told The Associated Press.

Vasquez spent 10 seasons in the Mexican League with Angelopolis and Quintana Roo before signing with the Yankees as a free agent before the 2009 season.

The 5-foot-11, 250-pound Vasquez—known as El Chato for his squat body—hit 63 homers in parts of four seasons in the Yankees organization, including 32 in 2011 and nearly made the club out of spring training after hitting .452 that March. But his defensive limitations thwarted his major league aspirations, despite his power.

He returned to Quintana Roo and has contributed in a part-time role, not posting an

OPS below .808 the past four seasons.

In the finale of the Caribbean Series, Mexico took an early 2-0 lead, but Venezuela scored twice in the fifth and twice more in the seventh to take a 4-2 lead.

Mexico's Sebastian Valle—who'll be in spring training with the Yankees—drove in two runs to tie the game.

Venezuela's only two losses in the series were to Mexico.

Longtime major league righthander Freddy Garcia started for Venezuela and gave up four hits and two earned runs over five innings but did not earn a decision. He announced his retirement after the game.

Brisbane Wins Aussie League

Donald Lutz, who in January re-signed with the Reds, blasted a three-run homer to score Rays prospects Riley Unroe and Justin Williams and help Brisbane beat Adelaide 7-1 on Feb. 6 to sweep the Australian Baseball League's championship series and win the Claxton Shield.

Lutz, who had a triple in Brisbane's Game One win, rose as high as No. 16 in the Reds' system entering the 2014 season and was No. 28 entering the 2015 season but was released in June after posting just a .554 OPS at Triple-A Louisville.

IN SHORT | PEPPER

ORIOLES' RAMIREZ DIES IN WRECK

Ramon Ramirez, who played at three levels in the Orioles' organization in 2015, was killed in a motorcycle accident in his native Dominican Republic Jan. 30.

According to MASN.com's Roch Kubatko, also BA's Orioles' correspondent, the accident took place as Ramirez was leaving a softball game.

Ramirez, 23, signed with the Orioles in July 2014. In 2015, he played at short-season Aberdeen, the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League and high-Class A Frederick.

"Our entire organization is deeply saddened by the sudden and tragic death of Ramon Ramirez," Orioles executive vice president of baseball operations Dan Duquette said in a statement.

DELMON YOUNG FACES BATTERY CHARGE

Free-agent outfielder Delmon Young, the No. 1 pick in the 2003 draft, was arrested and faces a battery charge after he allegedly choked and threatened to kill a valet attendant at the Viceroy hotel in Miami.

According to a Miami police report, Young, 30, grabbed a valet attendant by the neck and started to choke him after the attendant refused to let him into an elevator to a club at the hotel.

Young allegedly used anti-Cuban slurs both at the hotel and again when police went to his condominium.

In 2012, Young was arrested outside a New York City hotel after getting into a fight during which he allegedly yelled anti-Semitic slurs. He pleaded guilty and was ordered to perform 10 hours of community service.

SMOKELESS TOBACCO BAN

Major League Baseball has long tried to ban smokeless tobacco, but the players' union has opposed that move. Starting this season, however, smokeless tobacco will be banned in at AT&T Park in San Francisco, Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles and Fenway Park in Boston. Players will be barred from using the substance both on the field and in the clubhouse. A bill was moving through New York City Council at press time that would ban smokeless tobacco from Yankee Stadium and Citi Field as well.

DIRTBAG DONATIONS

Angels righthander Jered Weaver donated \$500,000 to Long Beach State, his alma mater, assisting the renovation project at Blair Field. Weaver's donation follows a \$1 million pledge made by Troy Tulowitzki in 2013, as well as \$100,000 by a former player who preferred to remain anonymous.



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Mike Trout

White was perfect fit in role as NL president



Tracy Ringolsby
Columnist,
MLB.com

DENVER

Bill White went about his normal routine on Feb. 3.

He went into "The City" for a while, returned to his Delaware River residence outside of Philadelphia, and tended to a few personal matters.

"No big deal," White said.

Twenty-seven years earlier, however, on Feb. 3, 1989, the day was a real big deal. White was appointed president of the National League, becoming at that time the highest-ranking African-American executive in professional sports.

Not that White thought about it in those terms. He knew his hiring was abnormal, but not because of racial reasons.

White was a former big league player. He was a longtime radio/television announcer. White wasn't part of the ownership or front-office inner circles.

He was an outsider.

White, however, felt he was certainly quali-

fied.

"If I didn't think I could do the job, I wouldn't have taken it," he said.

White did bring a unique perspective to the sessions with Major League Baseball owners and executives.

White came into baseball as a player in the early days of the game's integration. He was a five-time All-Star first baseman and won seven Gold Gloves during a 13-year career in which he played for the Cardinals, Giants and Phillies before moving into the broadcast booth to work Yankees games, where he worked with Phil Rizzuto from 1971-88.

"I think the experience I had in the game, having been a ball-player, having been a broadcaster, was a good background," White said. "I had been around the game. I knew what it was like on the field. I knew players and managers and coaches. As a broadcaster, I got to know club officials. I knew the members of the media from a player's standpoint and a broadcaster's standpoint. I had been a member of the Players Association, and I was trusted by them, some-

thing that wasn't common for an executive."

White, however, was a surprising choice. Oh, there were several African-American candidates offered up by the executive search firm baseball hired, but White wasn't on the original list that Major League Baseball started sorting through the previous August. He was first contacted only weeks before he was offered the job.

"My first comment was, 'Are you serious?'" White said. "But in meeting with people, I found out they were dead serious. Once I knew that, we proceeded from there."

And White quickly became the choice of the committee, on which then-Dodgers owner Peter O'Malley served.

"Bill White was selected because he was the best man for the job," O'Malley said at the time of the announcement. "He was the only man who was offered the job and, fortunately, he was the only man who accepted. Race was not a factor."

His hiring, however, represented a step forward.

"This is a highly significant appointment and should be regarded that way," Clifford Alexander, whose Washington, D.C., consulting firm worked to expand baseball's minority hiring, told The New York Times. "Baseball has set a standard that others can emulate. But if we think that one appointment is the beginning and the end, it isn't." White served in the role until 1994, when he was replaced by Leonard Coleman, also an African-American.



Bill White

Coleman served in the job until it was eliminated in 1999.

White felt his biggest accomplishment was overseeing the NL expansion that resulted in the addition of the Rockies and Marlins. He said it was evident at the time that the NL was going into Florida, and he pushed for Miami over the Tampa-St. Petersburg area because of the location of the domed stadium in St. Petersburg, and his familiarity with the area from his days with the Cardinals.

"For the presentation, they took us in a helicopter, not over the bridges," White said. "I felt that would be a problem with attendance. I knew you had to take a bridge to get to the park from the north and the east. I knew it was the only way to get there from the surrounding area."

White had no qualms with the proposal of a team in Denver.

"I had played there (as a visiting player) in the minor leagues, and it was always sold out," said White. "I knew it was where a team needed to be."

Now, at the age of 82, White is enjoying retirement and admits his exposure to baseball is limited. He said the last time he went to a game was the Phillies' home opener in 1995, when he was the guest of then-Phils president Dave Montgomery.

"I don't know many ex-players who like to sit and watch," he said. "They like to play. I never sat on the bench until my last two years, when I hurt my wrist, and that wasn't any fun."

Before White left baseball for good, however, he did leave his imprint on the game by serving as president of the NL.



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Relief proving more vital than ever



Peter Gammons

Columnist,
MLB Network

BOSTON

The 2015 Kansas City Royals had the 22nd-best starters' ERA in the game and won the World Series.

Dellin Betances, Andrew Miller and Aroldis Chapman faced 565 batters last season and struck out 347 of them.

The Orioles paid \$31 million to keep Darren O'Day. The Yankees have two \$10 million-plus relievers in their nine-out troika. The Red Sox moved three very good prospects for Craig Kimbrel and a 200-inning starter to Seattle for two more relievers. The Nationals have traded for Jonathan Papelbon and Trevor Gott and signed two more relievers. The Mets paid handsomely for Antonio Bastardo. The Astros traded big for Ken Giles.

This is a long way of saying, bullpens have become more important than ever.

"Honestly, we look to go to spring training with about eight potential starters and 12-13 relievers we can use during the season," one executive said. "The key is having flexibility. You have to have optionable pitchers, and you have to have a manager and coaches who can explain why someone is going to the minors."

Think about this: the Royals used 10 start-

ers and 21 relievers in 2015. The Indians used 11 starters and 19 relievers. The Orioles used eight starters and 18 relievers. The Dodgers used 16 starters and 21 relievers.

"What's so difficult is that relievers—especially the ones who don't come with the big price tags—are still volatile," said one general manager.

Like the Mariners, who in 2014 had the best bullpen ERA in the game (2.59) and in 2015 were 25th (4.15). The 2005 Indians led the majors in bullpen ERA, were 25th in 2006 and sixth in 2007.

The Cubs had one of the best bullpens in 2015, and one of their strengths was that in Travis Wood, Clayton Richard and Trevor Cahill they had three relievers who used to be starters, could throw multiple pitches, go long, even spot start. And now they've added Adam Warren.

Joe Blanton—who didn't pitch in the majors at all in 2014, was designated for assignment in June by the Royals but ended up one of the Pirates' best relievers down the stretch—got \$4 million from the Dodgers.

Neal Huntington's Pirates have been the rehabilitation center for pitching. Between major league pitching coach Ray Searage, minor league coordinator Jim Benedict and analytics expert Dan Fox, they turned Blanton into a slider pitcher and altered J.A. Happ's selection and mechanics. Each pitched well and made out well on the market.

No wonder the Marlins invested nearly \$1 million a year hiring Jim Benedict and farm director Marc DelPiano from the Pirates. Other than Jose Fernandez, the Marlins could only go outside and buy one free agent starter, Wei-Yin Chen. They have, in Jarrod Cosart, Tom Koehler, Adam Conley and Justin Nicolino, young pitchers who can be fixed, a la Pittsburgh. They are turning Edwin Jackson over to Benedict.

They have a closer in A.J. Ramos. They have in Carter Capps the pitcher with the highest strikeout rate in the game—118 batters faced, 58 strikeouts. Mike Dunn throws 94-97 from the left side. Kyle Barraclough throws 94 and over. Brian Ellington has touched 100. It's about fixing as many of them as possible, some in their arsenal and pitch usage, some mechanical, some mental.

And remember this: The last time José Fernandez and Giancarlo Stanton were in the starting lineup together was May 9, 2014.

If teams continue to build off 21st Century collaboration, the Royals, Pirates and Yankees may simply be the edge of the cold front.

Between defensive shifts and the gunboat brigades pitching the final nine to 12 outs, several managers and GMs this winter have suggested that teams will go back to 'Gene Mauch Baseball' and play smallball in the first couple of innings to get leads.

At the peak of the (Enhanced) Offensive Era, teams that scored first won 64.8 percent



The dominance of Wade Davis and the Royals' bullpen has changed how teams are built

of the time. A decade later, in 2015, that number had grown to 70.1 percent.

"We are at a point when offenses are challenged," one GM said. "And bullpens have a huge impact. I think you're going to see teams re-thinking the play-for-one-run idea, especially early in games."

If teams like the Pirates, Marlins, Red Sox, Indians and Cubs continue their pitching development processes and the average velocities continue to spike, the pendulum will have to begin moving back to the offense.

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Favorites earn coveted #cheeseball status



John Manuel

Editor in Chief
Baseball America
johnmanuel
@baseballamerica.com

If you follow me on Twitter, you may have seen me use a hashtag, #personalcheeseball. Approximately 100 percent of the time that I have used said hashtag, I've had to explain it. That's a good sign that it's not going to take off anytime soon.

Nevertheless, #personalcheeseball has come to be used in the BA offices as shorthand for a personal favorite

that does not reflect the popular consensus, much in the way that the nut-encrusted cheeseballs on sale in your grocery store's dairy section are looked down upon as a lesser cheese snack. I've never been able to find out which wine goes best with cheeseball.

I do know which prospect was my first #personalcheeseball. The honor, such as it is, goes to former Florida State second baseman Marshall McDougall, famous for hitting six home runs in a 1999 game at Maryland, setting Division I single-game records for homers and total bases. Despite a .419 season that included 28 homers, 104 RBIs and Most Outstanding Player honors at the College World Series, McDougall wasn't drafted until the 26th round.

Of course he didn't sign, came back to school with a chip on his shoulder and gave me fantastic quotes to that effect in the fall. I always had a soft spot for McDougall, who wound up a ninth-round pick as a senior in 2000, played 18 games in the major leagues and spent part of 13 seasons as a professional.

Other past #personalcheeseballs have hit (Carlos Quentin, Huston Street, Ryan Garko) and some (Nick Blackburn, Jason Pridie) not quite as well. I always thought Pridie would be a big league regular, based in part off his amateur scouting reports but also on seeing him in a dominant stretch in 2007 with Triple-A Durham. Instead, Pridie has been a classic Triple-A player who can't quite get over the hump, and he signed to play in Japan this year.

We spoke last year in Omaha at the Triple-A

All-Star Game, and he evinced no sense of bitterness over his career, which includes 133 big league games over parts of seven seasons. But he smiled and apologized for not living up to my expectations, which I took to be totally tongue in cheek.

The pressure's on for the rest of you personal cheeseballs. Here's the list from this year's prospect discussion, both players in the Top 100 and those who just missed.

CODY BELLINGER, 1B/OF, DODGERS: He was a fairly consensus BA pick, but Bellinger earns a #personalcheeseball designation for several factors. I got to see him play at the 2013 NHSI in Cary, N.C., and he was the best defensive first baseman I'd ever seen in high school. He played aggressively like a young Keith Hernandez, with his arm a weapon and his glove a real plus. He's athletic enough to play center field, he has shown hitting ability (2014) and power (2015), and I don't mind the big league bloodlines, as his dad Clay played in the majors. His dad also played for the 2004 Greek Olympic team, so Cody has a spot on my fantasy Greek WBC team. He's both a true prospect on the cusp of being an elite prospect whose personal angle vaults him into #cheeseball status.

HUNTER RENFROE, OF, PADRES: I've followed Renfroe's career since he was a high school senior at Copiah Academy in Mississippi, when he was one of the great pop-up players of the last 10 drafts. My favorite Renfroe story involves the doubleheader when a gaggle of national top-level scouts showed up to see him, only to see the opposing coach intentionally walk Renfroe every time he came to bat. One scout, who'll remain nameless here, came down the bleachers to the fence and offered to buy the opposing coach a steak dinner if he'd pitch to Renfroe. (The offer wasn't claimed.)

Of course, Renfroe also played his way at Mississippi State into a first-round pick who helped lead the Bulldogs to the 2013 College World Series finals, and he's reached Triple-A. As a prospect, I don't see a huge gap between him and the Yankees' Aaron Judge, and personally I prefer Renfroe. Give me the guy who, rumor has it, has brought down deer on his hunting trips with his bare hands.

JAMES KAPRIELIAN, RHP, YANKEES: He's a



Now in Triple-A, Hunter Renfroe got on the radar as a pop-up player as a high school senior in 2010

bit too obvious for this, but I had Kaprielian in my personal Top 100. Actually, he's my favorite college pitcher from the 2015 draft class, from his four-pitch mix and ability to use any pitch to get a swing and miss, to his increased velocity from his pro debut, to his toughness and mound presence, to pitching through the death of his mother in 2014 due to breast cancer. I look for Kaprielian to have an Ian Kennedy-type of career if not better.

For a few deeper cuts from this year's Prospect Handbook, I'll throw in:

TYLER WHITE, 3B/1B, ASTROS: White has so little prospect pedigree and scouts knock his defense, with merit. He's a 5-foot-11, 225-pound corner infielder who probably doesn't defend enough to be a big league third baseman, but White can flat-out hit—including .325/.442/.496 between Double-A and Triple-A in 2015—and was MVP of the Dominican League this winter. Meeting him last year in the Triple-A National Championship in El Paso sealed the deal; he's a down-home kid and grinder who has willed himself to this point of pro ball, and has a

chance to keep overachieving because of his strike-zone judgement and desire to get better.

JACOB WILSON, 3B/2B, CARDINALS: Wilson strikes me as a potential Ryan Roberts or Ryan Raburn, a versatile righthanded hitter with some thump who can play a role on a big league bench.

OSCAR DE LA CRUZ, RHP, CUBS: Sooner or later, the Cubs are going to develop a home-grown arm. De la Cruz is a couple of years away, but he's my favorite among their pitching prospects. He combines body control of a growing 6-foot-4, 200-pound frame with a starter's delivery and a plus fastball. He throws strikes with it with plus velocity and life. That's my kind of pitcher.

BRANDON SANGER, OF, ANGELS: The Angels have very few prospects, but one I like is not even in their Top 10. Sanger controls the strike zone and hits for average. I liked him at Florida Atlantic and liked him in his pro debut in Rookie-level Orem. If he hits in his first full-season assignment in 2016, he may graduate to full-fledged #personalcheeseball status.



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TOP 100 PROSPECTS

Prospect season never ends at Baseball America, but the Top 100 Prospects list is the natural demarcation line from one season to another. All of our countless conversations with scouts, coaches and team officials as well as many road trips over the past year have led to this list. And as soon as we put this Top 100 in your hands we'll start working and thinking about next year's list. The Top 100 was compiled by John Manuel, J.J. Cooper, Matt Eddy, Ben Badler, Josh Norris and Vince Lara-Cinisomo.



01 COREY SEAGER



04 JULIO URIAS

01 COREY SEAGER SS, DODGERS

HIT: 70. POWER: 60. SPEED: 40.
FIELDING: 45. ARM: 60. ETA: 2016.

02 BYRON BUXTON OF, TWINS

HIT: 70. POWER: 60. SPEED: 80.
FIELDING: 70. ARM: 70. ETA: 2016.

03 YOAN MONCADA 2B, RED SOX

HIT: 60. POWER: 55. SPEED: 65.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 55. ETA: 2017.

04 JULIO URIAS LHP, DODGERS

FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 60. CONTROL: 70. ETA: 2017.

05 LUCAS GIOLITO RHP, NATIONALS

FASTBALL: 80. CURVEBALL: 70.
CHANGEUP: 55. CONTROL: 60. ETA: 2016.

06 J.P. CRAWFORD SS, PHILLIES

HIT: 60. POWER: 50. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 60. ETA: 2016.

07 ALEX REYES RHP, CARDINALS

FASTBALL: 80. CURVEBALL: 65.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 45. ETA: 2017.

08 ORLANDO ARCIA SS, BREWERS

HIT: 65. POWER: 45. SPEED: 65.
FIELDING: 70. ARM: 70. ETA: 2016.

09 TREA TURNER SS, NATIONALS

HIT: 60. POWER: 40. SPEED: 75.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 55. ETA: 2016.

10 JOEY GALLO 3B/OF, RANGERS

HIT: 50. POWER: 80. SPEED: 40.
FIELDING: 45. ARM: 70. ETA: 2016.

11 A.J. REED 1B, ASTROS

HIT: 60. POWER: 65. SPEED: 30.
FIELDING: 40. ARM: 60. ETA: 2016.

12 BLAKE SNELL LHP, RAYS

FASTBALL: 70. SLIDER: 55.
CHANGEUP: 65. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2016.

13 STEVEN MATZ LHP, METS

FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 50.
CHANGEUP: 60. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2016.

14 TYLER GLASNOW RHP, PIRATES

FASTBALL: 70. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2016.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Mississippi duo charts unlikely Top 100 path

BY J.J. COOPER

Reds lefthander Cody Reed has most everything a scout looks for in a lefty starter: a big body, the size that can denote durability and the plus stuff that makes hitters wince.

Blue Jays center fielder Anthony Alford fits the prototype for a top-of-the-order table setter. He has a solid understanding of the strike zone and the quick hands that allow him to line singles and doubles. And he's got the speed to make pitchers nervous when he's standing on first base.

Alford (No. 25 on the Baseball America Top 100 Prospects list) and Reed (No. 34) are among the best prospects in the minors heading into the 2016 season. Neither came close to making this list last year. They are also two of the unlikely Top 100 Prospects, albeit for different reasons.

Skin And Bones

The first time Cody Reed was told he was going to be a pro pitcher, he didn't believe it.

A high school lefty with a pencil-like build—as Reed says “skinny doesn't begin to describe it”—and a low-80s fastball, Reed had plenty of success but little stuff.

But Northwest Mississippi JC assistant coach (and former big leaguer) Bill Selby saw

some glimmer of the future, saying, “This guy will get paid to play one day.”

“Who thinks a guy throwing 83 will get paid to play one day?” Reed said.

In just the span of a couple of years, the 6-foot-5, 165-pound high school senior turned into a much more imposing 6-foot-5, 230-pound man. His fastball came along for the ride. As he kept getting bigger and his fastball got firmer, it became clear Reed would get paid.

The Royals picked Reed in the second round of the 2013 draft, signing him for just under \$1.2 million. His first two pro seasons were a massive struggle as his stuff backed up and his control troubles worsened. After ranking 28th on the Royals Top 30 Prospects list heading into 2014, Reed didn't crack the Top 30 last season after posting a 5.46 ERA in low Class A Lexington.

All that changed in 2015. Reed can't point to a mechanical tweak or a new pitch, but he says he felt better about his offseason workouts and his arm when spring training began. He had added flexibility, which enabled him to get to his stuff more consistently. He was a Carolina League all-star, was promoted to Double-A and then was traded to the Reds in the deal that sent Johnny Cueto to the Royals.

Reed had gotten the Reds' attention in part



Anthony Alford quickly caught up to his competition in his first full pro season

a Bo Jackson or Deion Sanders.”

The Blue Jays gave Alford a chance to keep the dream alive longer than most. Toronto offered him \$750,000 in the third round to play pro baseball around his college football schedule. As Alford saw it, he would have been crazy to not give it a try.

It hasn't always worked out to plan—Alford's football career never really got going between a year as a quarterback at Southern Mississippi and two years at Mississippi as a defensive back, but those stumbles led to a realization.

“It's not like I came out of high school, played just baseball and would look back and wish I had played college football. I had the opportunity to play (football). I tried football and it didn't work out. I can focus 100 percent. I don't have to have any regrets.”

Alford had played only five games for the Blue Jays in 2012, six in 2013 and 14 in 2014. While his contemporaries moved up the pro ladder, Alford was barely getting his cleats broken in.

So as Alford focused on baseball for the first time, it would have been logical for 2015 to have turned into a year of setbacks and glimpses of future potential. Instead Alford managed to make the transition to baseball look easy. He hit .293/.418/.394 with low Class A Lansing, earning a Midwest League all-star appearance. A midseason promotion to the Florida State League didn't slow him down as he hit .302/.380/.444 in Dunedin.

“He should have had more atrophy in there,” a pro scout who saw Alford several times in 2015 said. “It shows you that superior athletes with good instruction can overcome anything.”

with a dominating inning at the all-star game where he was blowing away hitters with a 97-99 mph fastball.

Two-Sport Dreams

Alford had always dreamed of being a big league baseball player, but that was only part of his goals.

“I wanted to play in the NFL and Major League Baseball,” Alford said. “I wanted to be

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Lack of Top 100 Prospects has led to struggles

BY MATT EDDY

Ranking the game's top 100 prospects, as Baseball America has done annually since 1990, casts a net so wide that organizations rarely slip through the cracks and place no prospects on the list.

For the first 26 years of Top 100 Prospects history, up through 2015, just eight orgs had failed to place even one representative on the list. Yet this year, four orgs—the Angels, Marlins, Mariners and Orioles—will not have their names attached to any player ranked inside the Top 100.

The Mariners (Alex Jackson) and Orioles (Dylan Bundy, Hunter Harvey and Chance Sisco) had prospects who appeared on individual Top 100 ballots by the BA editorial staff, but not one of those players garnered the widespread support necessary to make the final cut.

The Angels and Marlins, on the other hand, would have had representation on the Top 100 had they not traded away notable prospects Sean Newcomb (the No. 4 lefthander on our list) and Francis Martes (the No. 5 righthander).

Even with 30 organizations vying for 100 spots on the final ranking, instead of the 26 when the Top 100 debuted in 1990, the Top 100 club is fairly inclusive, with accommodations for an average of 3.3 players per org.

The Angels, Marlins, Mariners and Orioles may be the Fallow Four in terms of impact prospects for 2016, but what consequences might they face in the future for such neglect of the farm system? To find possible outcomes, let's turn our attention to the precedents cited above, the organizations that placed no prospects in the Top 100 from 1990 to 2015. In chronological order, the Empty Eight are listed below, along with each system's No. 1 prospect and his age that season.

Year	Org	No. 1 Prospect	Age
1999	Angels	Ramon Ortiz, rhp	26
2002	D-backs	Luis Terrero, of	22
2003	Cardinals	Dan Haren, rhp	22
2003	Orioles	Erik Bedard, lhp	24
2007	Padres	Cedric Hunter, of	19
2008	White Sox	Gio Gonzalez, lhp	22
2011	Brewers	Mark Rogers, rhp	25
2015	Tigers	Steven Moya, of	23

And here are the four 2016 orgs to be shut out.

Year	Org	No. 1 Prospect	Age
2016	Angels	Taylor Ward, c	22
2016	Mariners	Alex Jackson, of	20
2016	Marlins	Tyler Kolek, rhp	20
2016	Orioles	Dylan Bundy, rhp	23

We don't have sufficient data to analyze the 2016 teams or the 2015 Tigers, but every other club in the sample has completed at least five seasons after their Top 100 no-show, counting that season as Year One and continuing for the subsequent four seasons. In graph form, the results look like this:

What we find for the seven eligible teams is that, in terms of big league winning percentage, life was generally as good in Year One or Two as it would be in the five-year period sampled. This is true for all orgs but the 1999 Angels and, arguably, the 2007 Padres, who recorded a fluky 90-win campaign in 2010.

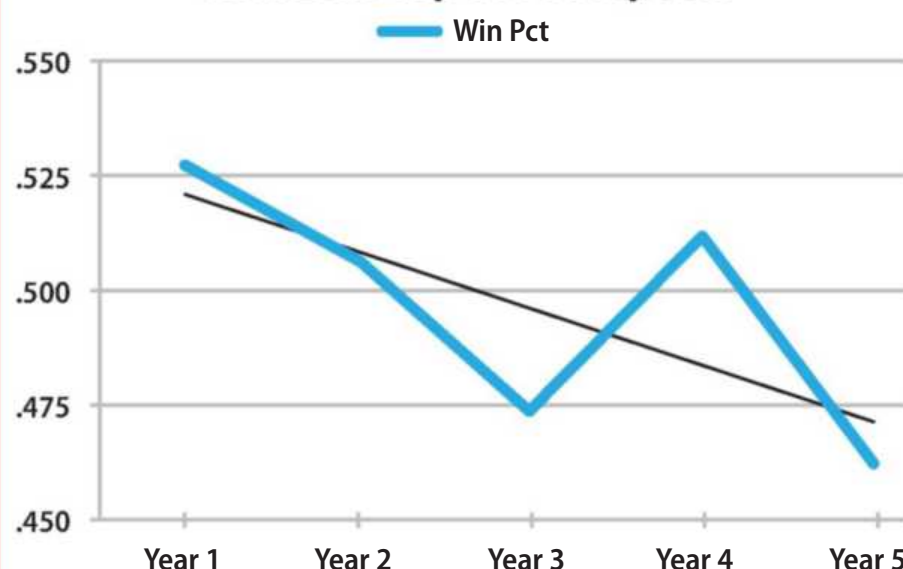
What this indicates is that teams with little impact prospect talent in their systems had better be poised to win now, because those wins are going to be harder to come by in Years Three, Four and Five, possibly because of a lack of young, impact talent introduced early in the process.

Note that two teams that began with zero Top 100 talents managed to win the World Series within the specified five-year window: the 2002 Angels and the 2006 Cardinals. Both clubs did so in Year Four, which helps account for the upward surge in winning percentage from Year Three to Four, an outcome that halts two sharp decreases. However, even if one removes the Year Four Angels and Cardinals from the dataset, the remaining teams still combined for a .491 winning percentage, rather than the .512 produced with those two teams present.

In general, the Angels and Cardinals succeeded beyond Year One or Two despite starting with zero Top 100 Prospects, while the other five clubs did not fare as well at a remove from Year One. The Angels' 2002 World Series team, though, was homegrown, with five players who'd previous ranked in a Top 100.

We dove much deeper into the record online at BaseballAmerica.com/t/Fallow-Four.

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ELIAS DIAZ

PITTSBURGH

MIKE JAMES

Last year, Pittsburgh's Elias Diaz became the fifth winner of Captain's Catcher Award, presented by All-Star, given each year to the minor league catcher whose defensive qualities stand out.

Diaz has impressed scouts, coaches and pitchers for years with his ability to handle a staff. He joins previous winners Travis D'Arnaud (2011), Tim Federowicz (2012), Austin Hedges (2013) and Blake Swihart (2014). D'Arnaud was the starting catcher for New York's National League champs in 2015. Swihart had an excellent rookie debut last season and should be in Boston for years to come. Hedges also made it to the big leagues in 2015 as he served as a backup catcher in San Diego. Federowicz signed with Chicago (NL) for 2016 after an injury-plagued 2015. Diaz is expected to compete for a job in Pittsburgh.

2016 CAPTAIN'S CATCHERS AWARD WATCH LIST

Player, Team	PCT	G	E	PB	SBA	CS	PCT
Armando Araiza, Tampa Bay	.984	84	10	9	80	36	.450
Elias Diaz, Pittsburgh	.984	60	7	4	46	14	.304
Mitch Garver, Minnesota	.993	77	4	6	74	28	.378
Joe Hudson, Cincinnati	.983	78	11	13	74	37	.500
Brian Navarretto, Minnesota	.997	84	2	11	107	27	.252
Tom Murphy, Colorado	.976	85	15	11	79	24	.304
Roberto Pena, Houston	.993	72	4	2	51	25	.490
Pedro Severino, Washington	.981	91	8	9	95	36	.379
Beau Taylor, Oakland	.997	73	2	9	79	38	.481
Tony Wolters, Cleveland	.994	56	3	3	77	38	.494

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

15 ANDREW BENINTENDI OF, RED SOX
HIT: 70. POWER: 55. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

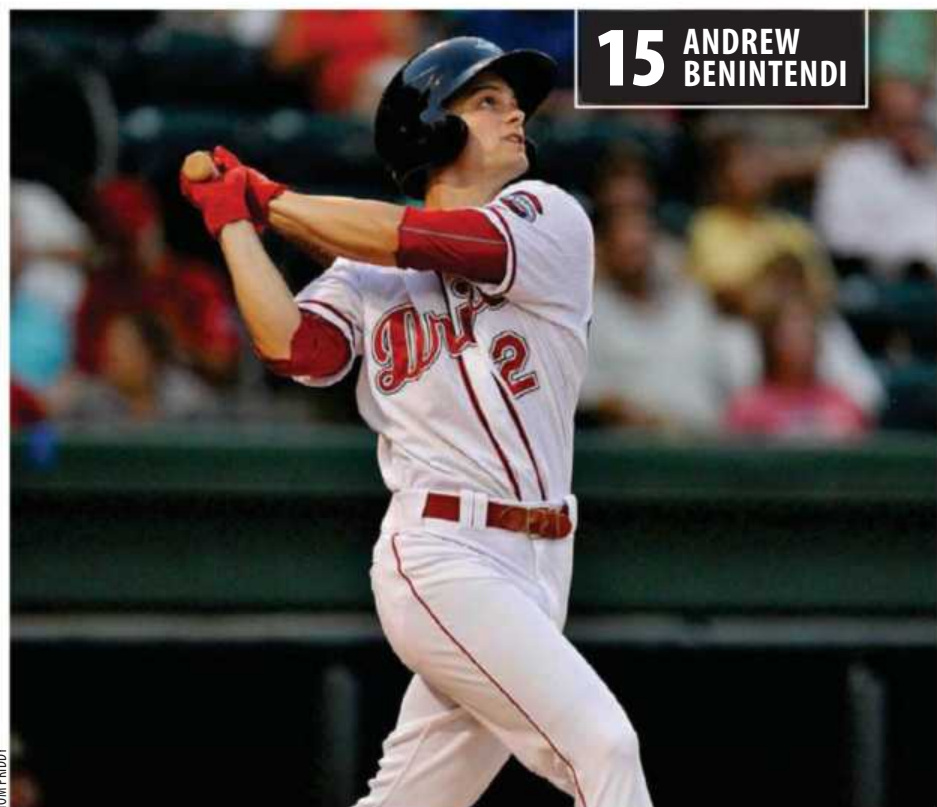
16 LEWIS BRINSON OF, RANGERS
HIT: 50. POWER: 60. SPEED: 60.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 60. ETA: 2017.

17 DANSBY SWANSON SS, BRAVES
HIT: 60. POWER: 45. SPEED: 60.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 55. ETA: 2016.

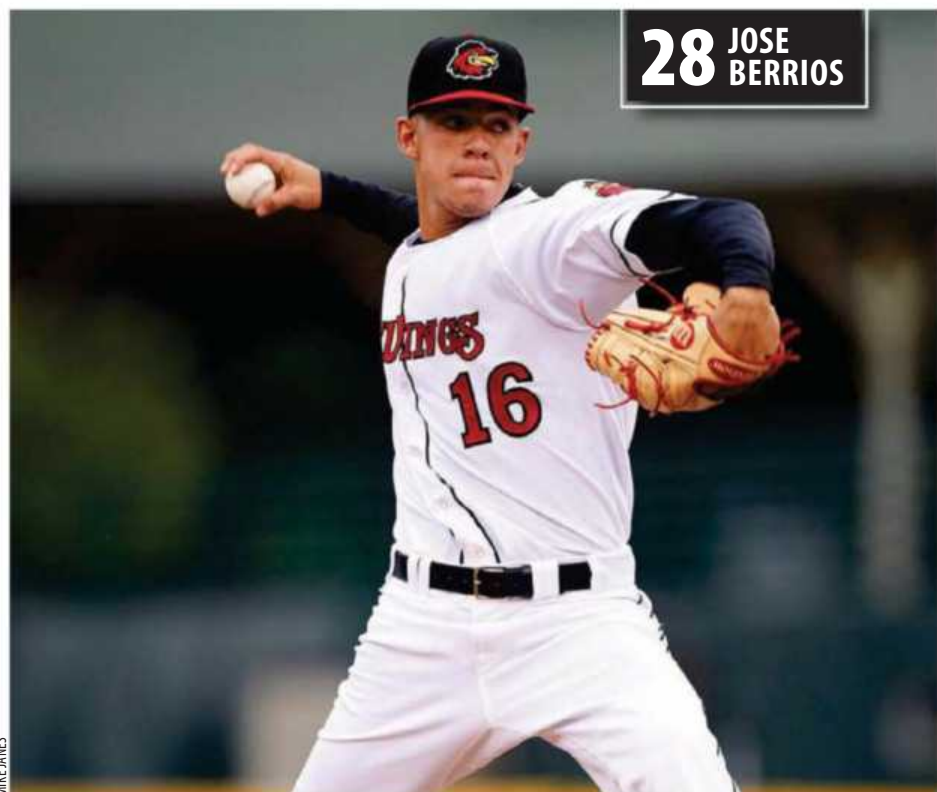
18 RAFAEL DEVERS 3B, RED SOX
HIT: 60. POWER: 60. SPEED: 20.
FIELDING: 40. ARM: 60. ETA: 2018.

19 ANDERSON ESPINOZA RHP, RED SOX
FASTBALL: 80. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 60. CONTROL: 60. ETA: 2018.

20 FRANCIS MARTES RHP, ASTROS
FASTBALL: 70. CURVEBALL: 70.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2017.



15 ANDREW BENINTENDI



28 JOSE BERRIOS

SPLIT DECISIONS TOP-RATED LHPS



ALYSON BOYER/REUTERS; TOMASSO D'ARCO

Blake Snell (12) vs. Steven Matz (13)

JOHN MANUEL: Because Matz has major league time and pitched well in that time, I can see giving Matz the edge. For me, it's a matter of Snell's constant improvement in the minors with his breaking ball getting better and his control trending in the right direction. For me, he's got the higher ceiling with the easy velocity, potential above-average breaker and plus changeup. Other advantages for Snell are age and lack of injury history though Matz's TJ is far in the past. Both guys look like potential No. 2 starters to me.

J.J. COOPER: I appear to be the most optimistic about Matz's health and future durability. He made 21 starts in 2013, 24 starts in 2014 and 27 starts in 2015 (counting the playoffs). The Mets have understandably been cautious with how they handle his workload but from 2013-2015, Matz has thrown 431 innings and Snell has thrown 348. If I'm sizing the two up, I think both have excellent stuff, but I would give the edge to Matz as having slightly better stuff. Matz has shown better control throughout

his career than Snell. And Matz has gotten a chance to prove his stuff works very well against big leaguers. Add it up and as much as I like Snell, I'd rather have Matz, even if he's a year and a half older.

BEN BADLER: Matz has shown he can have success against major league hitters, both during the regular season and during the playoffs throughout the Mets' run to the World Series. That's certainly a point in his favor, but him pitching well on the big stage where everyone is watching him also makes him prone to being overrated, simply because everyone got to see him pitch and that memory is fresh in our minds. Snell hasn't had that opportunity, but wow, did he have a dominant, historic season with a powerful repertoire. J.J. makes a good point about Matz's arm health being cleaner the last few years than it was earlier in his career, but I'm harsh on pitchers and the medical history there still gives me pause when it comes to longevity. If I had to pick a pitcher just for 2016, I'd go with Matz. But long term, give me Snell.

21 NOMAR MAZARA OF, RANGERS
HIT: 60. POWER: 60. SPEED: 20.
FIELDING: 40. ARM: 60. ETA: 2016.

22 AUSTIN MEADOWS OF, PIRATES
HIT: 70. POWER: 45. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 40. ETA: 2017.

23 JOSE DE LEON RHP, DODGERS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 50.
CHANGEUP: 60. CONTROL: 55. ETA: 2016.

24 SEAN NEWCOMB LHP, BRAVES
FASTBALL: 65. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 55. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2017.

25 ANTHONY ALFORD OF, BLUE JAYS
HIT: 60. POWER: 45. SPEED: 70.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 40. ETA: 2017.

26 JORGE MATEO SS, YANKEES
HIT: 55. POWER: 50. SPEED: 80.
FIELDING: 55. ARM: 60. ETA: 2018.

27 NICK WILLIAMS OF, PHILLIES
HIT: 60. POWER: 60. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 55. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

28 JOSE BERRIOS RHP, TWINS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 50.
CHANGEUP: 60. CONTROL: 65. ETA: 2016.

29 RAUL A. MONDESI SS, ROYALS
HIT: 55. POWER: 50. SPEED: 70.
FIELDING: 70. ARM: 70. ETA: 2017.

30 MAX KEPLER OF/1B, TWINS
HIT: 60. POWER: 45. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 45. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

SPLIT DECISIONS YOUNG SHORTSTOPS



ROBERT GURGANIUS, MIKE JAMES

Jorge Mateo (26) vs. Raul A. Mondesi (29)

JJ COOPER: Jorge Mateo has a great season. He dominated the South Atlantic League and had a great finish in the Florida State League. But it's worth noting that Mateo is older than Mondesi. I can't help but wonder what kind of numbers Mondesi would put up if he had spent much of the season in the Sally League—Mondesi's stint in Lexington was two full seasons ago. Tools-wise I'd argue Mondesi has the edge in power, defense and arm while they have similar speed. Mateo uses his speed better and has a potentially better hit tool, but I don't think the difference there is as much as it would appear from their minor league statistics.

JOHN MANUEL: I was a little startled to see Mateo is older than Mondesi; it almost made me reverse my rankings. But Mateo does appear to get more out of his tools, particularly his speed. He gets a bit of a mulligan for his age considering he essentially lost a year to injury. Mondesi's lack of production to this point is frustrating; there are mitigating factors such as ballpark context and age, but I'd love to see what he would do if he actually got a chance to play a year at an age-appropriate level.

BEN BADLER: I don't know what to do with Raul Mondesi. He's a true shortstop who grades out extremely well for his tools, his athleticism and his overall baseball IQ, particularly in the field. But it's hard to evaluate a player who has been pushed so aggressively and simply has not performed

well. Not that I would expect him to perform well—we're talking about a player who played in the high Class A Carolina League at 18 then jumped to Double-A last year when he was 19, an age where his peers are at least two levels behind him for the most part. Plus, like John said, he's been doing it some pitcher-friendly ballparks. If Mondesi had raked at those levels, we would be talking about a top 10 prospect in baseball. Until Mondesi shows some semblance of successful performance for me to be more comfortable with his bat, the edge for me goes to Mateo. Don't get me wrong, I have questions about Mateo's bat too (I have both players lower on my list than the rest of the staff does) because I wouldn't consider him a pure hitter, but there's at least more of a track record off quality offensive performance with Mateo.

MATT EDDY: In terms of power and speed, Mateo and Mondesi produced at similar rates in 2015, albeit with Mateo at low Class A (primarily) and Mondesi at Double-A. The reason I ranked Mateo inside and Mondesi outside my top 50 is hitting approach. Mondesi pushed his strikeout and walk rates so far into the red at Northwest Arkansas that he's going to have to be awfully productive on balls in play to make that sort of approach work in the majors. Mateo, meanwhile, has a broader base of secondary skills if he can maintain some semblance of the walk rate he showed in 2015.



35 FRANKLIN BARRETO

BILL MITCHELL



42 ALEX BREGMAN

PAUL GIERHART

31 BRADLEY ZIMMER OF, INDIANS
HIT: 55. POWER: 55. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 55. ETA: 2017.

32 ROBERT STEPHENSON RHP, REDS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 70.
CHANGEUP: 70. CONTROL: 45. ETA: 2017.

33 VICTOR ROBLES OF, NATIONALS
HIT: 55. POWER: 50. SPEED: 70.
FIELDING: 65. ARM: 70. ETA: 2019.

34 CODY REED LHP, REDS
FASTBALL: 70. SLIDER: 70.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2017.

35 FRANKLIN BARRETO SS, ATHLETICS
HIT: 60. POWER: 50. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

36 GARY SANCHEZ C, YANKEES
HIT: 50. POWER: 60. SPEED: 20.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 70. ETA: 2016.

37 JON GRAY RHP, ROCKIES
FASTBALL: 70. SLIDER: 60.
CHANGEUP: 55. CONTROL: 55. ETA: 2016.

38 JOSH BELL 1B/OF, PIRATES
HIT: 60. POWER: 60. SPEED: 40.
FIELDING: 40. ARM: 55. ETA: 2016.

39 DAVID DAHL OF, ROCKIES
HIT: 60. POWER: 55. SPEED: 60.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 55. ETA: 2017.

40 BRENDAN RODGERS SS, ROCKIES
HIT: 55. POWER: 60. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 55. ETA: 2019.

41 GLEYBER TORRES SS, CUBS
HIT: 60. POWER: 60. SPEED: 55. DEFENSE: 60. ARM: 60. ETA: 2018.

42 ALEX BREGMAN SS, ASTROS
HIT: 60. POWER: 45. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

43 RYAN McMAHON 3B, ROCKIES
HIT: 55. POWER: 60. SPEED: 40.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 60. ETA: 2017.

44 CLINT FRAZIER OF, INDIANS
HIT: 50. POWER: 65. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 55. ETA: 2017.

45 TIM ANDERSON SS, WHITE SOX
HIT: 60. POWER: 50. SPEED: 70.
FIELDING: 55. ARM: 55. ETA: 2016.

46 WILLY ADAMES SS, RAYS
HIT: 55. POWER: 55. SPEED: 40.
FIELDING: 55. ARM: 60. ETA: 2017.

47 MICHAEL FULMER RHP, TIGERS
FASTBALL: 60. SLIDER: 60.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 55. ETA: 2016.

48 SEAN MANAEA LHP, ATHLETICS
FASTBALL: 60. SLIDER: 55.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2016.

SPLIT DECISIONS LEFTHANDED-HITTING OUTFIELDERS



CLIFF WELCH, MIKE JAMES

Austin Meadows (22) vs. Nick Williams (27) vs. Max Kepler (30)

JOHN MANUEL: Meadows has the easiest, smoothest swing of these guys and had the best amateur track record, which matters to me. I'm sure I have a small bias toward him from having done the Florida State League Top 20. He and Kepler have the best chance to add defensive value in center field, but for me, I ranked these guys as future left fielders whose value comes from the bat, and I ranked them

in this order based on faith in their future offensive value. Williams has the most volatility of the group—higher upside, worst strike-zone judgment. He could wind up being a tease.

MATT EDDY: While conceding that Williams has more power—and significantly more opposite-field power—than Kepler or Meadows, I project the last two to produce

more offensive value for their teams in the plate appearances that don't end with home runs, which is most of them. Neither speed nor defense is a separating tool for any of these outfielders, but in light of the ever-expanding strikeout-to-walk ratio in the majors, I trust the hitting approaches of Kepler (13.4 SO%, 13.6 BB%) and Meadows (14.4% SO, 7.4 BB%) to that of Williams (18.8 SO%, 6.8 BB%).



44 CLINT FRAZIER

49 TRENT CLARK OF, BREWERS
HIT: 60. POWER: 40. SPEED: 60.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 50. ETA: 2018.

50 KENTA MAEDA RHP, DODGERS
FASTBALL: 50. CURVEBALL: 45. SLIDER: 55.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 60. ETA: 2016.

51 JESSE WINKER OF, REDS
HIT: 60. POWER: 50. SPEED: 40.
FIELDING: 45. ARM: 45. ETA: 2016.

52 JAVIER GUERRA SS, PADRES
HIT: 50. POWER: 55. SPEED: 45.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 65. ETA: 2018.

53 NICK GORDON SS, TWINS
HIT: 50. POWER: 20. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 60. ETA: 2018.

54 CODY BELLINGER 1B/OF, DODGERS
HIT: 55. POWER: 60. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

55 HECTOR OLIVERA 3B/OF, BRAVES
HIT: 60. POWER: 55. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 50. ETA: 2016.

56 MANUEL MARGOT OF, PADRES
HIT: 50. POWER: 45. SPEED: 60.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 55. ETA: 2017.

SPLIT DECISIONS FIRST BASEMEN



CLIFF WELCH, MIKE JAMES

Jake Bauers (78) vs. Dominic Smith (79) vs. Bobby Bradley (93)

JJ COOPER: I like how we have Bauers and Smith back-to-back because they are very similar type of prospects. Both are strong defensive first basemen (edge to Smith) and above-average hitters with questions about how much power they'll hit. Bauers is a better athlete (and can play left field as well as first base). Smith was obviously a much higher draft pick, but a lot of that came back to Smith's longer track record as an amateur. From their senior year in high school on, Bauers has matched or bettered Smith hit for hit and he's a little younger. But the more I think about it, the more I think Bradley could end up the best of this trio. I understand why he's ranked third because he's a level or two behind Smith and Bauers, but when it comes to ceiling I think Bradley has significantly more upside. He's dominated the AZL and the Midwest League in his first two seasons with the kind of power we'll never see from Bauers or Smith. The strikeout rate is concerning, but

it wasn't high enough to think he can't tame it as he matures—he'll start this season in high Class A as a 19-year-old.

JOHN MANUEL: I ranked Bauers ahead of Smith in our Florida State League Top 20. Smith may have a bit more ceiling but because he's a bad-body guy with some questions about his work ethic and future power potential. One other piece of info on Smith that raises doubts is the lack of energy he shows day to day, particularly defensively. I've talked to SoCal area scouts who observed the same things when he was an amateur. Bradley has significantly more power potential but the greatest risk of the trio; his strikeout rate is higher than any other player on the Top 100 other than Joey Gallo, who has more power, has hit 40 home runs in a pro season and has reached the major leagues.

BEN BADLER: I have all three of these players

bunched fairly close together. Bradley's raw power is tremendous, and if he learns to make more contact, he could be the best player of this group. But we've also said the same thing about too many sluggers who crushed A-ball pitching with alarming strikeout rates only to see the holes in their swings and their approaches get exposed as they face better pitching. So while I agree with J.J. that Bradley absolutely could be the best player of this group, I'm more comfortable betting on Bauers' bat. The short swing, the ability to recognize spin and control the strike zone, those are all strong markers of future success, especially from a guy who was already in Double-A as a teenager. The modest home run output is a risk factor at a position where you have to mash, but he's still so young that the power could come later on, like it did for Adrian Gonzalez or Anthony Rizzo, although we've also seen plenty of other examples where it never developed.



69 DILLON TATE

TONY FARLOW

57 BRETT PHILLIPS OF, BREWERS
HIT: 60. POWER: 45. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 55. ARM: 70. ETA: 2017.

58 AMED ROSARIO SS, METS
HIT: 50. POWER: 40. SPEED: 60.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 60. ETA: 2017.

59 JORGE LOPEZ RHP, BREWERS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2016.

60 AARON BLAIR RHP, BRAVES
FASTBALL: 55. CURVEBALL: 50. SLIDER: 45.
CHANGEUP: 60. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2016.

61 KYLE TUCKER OF, ASTROS
HIT: 60. POWER: 60. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 50. ETA: 2019.

62 CHRISTIAN ARROYO SS, GIANTS
HIT: 60. POWER: 50. SPEED: 45.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

63 OZZIE ALBIES SS/2B, BRAVES
HIT: 60. POWER: 20. SPEED: 60.
FIELDING: 55. ARM: 60. ETA: 2017.

64 LUIS ORTIZ RHP, RANGERS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 45. SLIDER: 70.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 60. ETA: 2018.

65 BRENT HONEYWELL RHP, RAYS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 50.
CHANGEUP: 60. CONTROL: 60. ETA: 2017.

66 JOSE PERAZA SS/2B, REDS
HIT: 60. POWER: 20. SPEED: 70.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 50. ETA: 2016.

67 WILLSON CONTRERAS C, CUBS
HIT: 55. POWER: 50. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 55. ETA: 2017.

68 JEFF HOFFMAN RHP, ROCKIES
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 55. SLIDER: 50.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 60. ETA: 2017.

69 DILLON TATE RHP, RANGERS
FASTBALL: 60. SLIDER: 60.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2017.

70 CARSON FULMER RHP, WHITE SOX
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 45. ETA: 2017.



73 AMIR GARRETT



82 ERICK FEDDE

71 BRADY AIKEN LHP, INDIANS
FASTBALL: 65. CURVEBALL: 60. SLIDER: 50.
CHANGEUP: 60. CONTROL: 55. ETA: 2019.

72 GRANT HOLMES RHP, DODGERS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 55.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 45. ETA: 2018.

73 AMIR GARRETT LHP, REDS
FASTBALL: 60. SLIDER: 50.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 45. ETA: 2017.

74 DAZ CAMERON OF, ASTROS
HIT: 45. POWER: 50. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 55. ETA: 2019.

75 JAKE THOMPSON RHP, PHILLIES
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 45. SLIDER: 65.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 55. ETA: 2016.

76 AARON JUDGE OF, YANKEES
HIT: 45. POWER: 75. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 60. ETA: 2016.

77 BRADEN SHIPLEY RHP, DIAMONDBACKS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 55. CONTROL: 45. ETA: 2016.

78 JAKE BAUERS 1B/OF, RAYS
HIT: 65. POWER: 50. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 45. ETA: 2017.

79 DOMINIC SMITH 1B, METS
HIT: 60. POWER: 50. SPEED: 20.
FIELDING: 60. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

80 TYLER JAY LHP, TWINS
FASTBALL: 65. CURVEBALL: 60. SLIDER: 70.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 60. ETA: 2017.

81 JUSTUS SHEFFIELD LHP, INDIANS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 55. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2018.

82 ERICK FEDDE RHP, NATIONALS
FASTBALL: 60. SLIDER: 55.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 55. ETA: 2017.

83 JOE MUSGROVE RHP, ASTROS
FASTBALL: 60. SLIDER: 50.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 70. ETA: 2016.

84 KOLBY ALLARD LHP, BRAVES
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 55. ETA: 2019.

85 KYLE ZIMMER RHP, ROYALS
FASTBALL: 60. CURVEBALL: 70. SLIDER: 45.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2016.

86 HUNTER RENFROE OF, PADRES
HIT: 50. POWER: 60. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 55. ARM: 60. ETA: 2016.

SPLIT DECISIONS BACK OF 100 CATCHERS



CLIFF WELCH; MIKE JAMES; BILL MITCHELL

Andrew Knapp (96) vs. Tom Murphy (97) vs. Tyler Stephenson (98)

JOHN MANUEL: Stephenson fits a very risky demographic as a high school catcher picked in the first round. He's got the highest ceiling here, but I'm comfortable being conservative with his ranking. Knapp has loud offensive tools and a good track record for having a feel for hitting. We'll see whether or not he'll be good enough defensively, but I have faith in the reports that give him average potential.

Murphy had an injury-plagued year last year but he has shown the tools to be a starter if not a starter. His grinder makeup gives me another reason to like him.

J.J. COOPER: These are three very different catchers. Stephenson is the long way away, high ceiling all-around catcher. Murphy is the very reliable big league ready catcher with a

solid but unspectacular upside. Knapp is the breakout hitter in 2015 who needs to prove his defense is up to the task. I like having all three of them ranked. The funny thing for me is I think Stephenson has the biggest ceiling and Murphy has the highest floor, but Knapp is ranked highest. It's the combination of floor and ceiling that leads Knapp to a ever-so-slightly higher ranking.



90 TOUKI TOUSSAINT

87 IAN HAPP OF/2B, CUBS
HIT: 55. POWER: 50. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 45. ARM: 50. ETA: 2017.

88 CORNELIUS RANDOLPH OF, PHILLIES
HIT: 60. POWER: 50. SPEED: 40.
FIELDING: 40. ARM: 50. ETA: 2019.

89 MICHAEL KOPECH RHP, RED SOX
FASTBALL: 70. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 40. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2018.

90 TOUKI TOUSSAINT RHP, BRAVES
FASTBALL: 70. CURVEBALL: 70.
CHANGEUP: 55. CONTROL: 40. ETA: 2018.

91 DAVID PAULINO RHP, ASTROS
FASTBALL: 70. CURVEBALL: 60.
CHANGEUP: 50. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2018.

92 REYNALDO LOPEZ RHP, NATIONALS
FASTBALL: 75. CURVEBALL: 55.
CHANGEUP: 45. CONTROL: 50. ETA: 2017.

93 BOBBY BRADLEY 1B, INDIANS
HIT: 50. POWER: 65. SPEED: 20.
FIELDING: 45. ARM: 50. ETA: 2018.

94 BRANDON DRURY 3B/2B, DIAMONDBACKS
HIT: 55. POWER: 50. SPEED: 30.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 55. ETA: 2016.

95 HAROLD RAMIREZ OF, PIRATES
HIT: 55. POWER: 40. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 45. ETA: 2017.

96 ANDREW KNAPP C, PHILLIES
HIT: 55. POWER: 50. SPEED: 30.
FIELDING: 45. ARM: 50. ETA: 2016.

97 TOM MURPHY C, ROCKIES
HIT: 45. POWER: 55. SPEED: 30.
FIELDING: 55. ARM: 55. ETA: 2016.

98 TYLER STEPHENSON C, REDS
HIT: 60. POWER: 60. SPEED: 40.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 60. ETA: 2019.

99 JORGE POLANCO SS/2B, TWINS
HIT: 55. POWER: 30. SPEED: 55.
FIELDING: 50. ARM: 50. ETA: 2016.

100 ALEX VERDUGO OF, DODGERS
HIT: 60. POWER: 40. SPEED: 50.
FIELDING: 40. ARM: 60. ETA: 2017.

Kaprielian, Cease may take big leap in 2016

Every year, once the Top 100 prospects list is released, editors at Baseball America are asked three main questions: How close did my favorite prospect come to the list? Could my favorite prospect make a big jump up the list? Why didn't my favorite prospect make the list?

Well, we can't answer every question but here's some tidbits on players who could climb and who has fallen.

JUST MISSED

Here's a look at some prospects who missed the 2016 Top 100 list but could easily jump onto next year's list.

JAMES KAPRIELIAN | RHP, Yankees

Kaprielian, the Yankees' 2015 first-rounder from UCLA, was one of the last few players in consideration for the final spot on the list. His fastball bumped 96-97 mph in pro ball with short-season Staten Island and in fall instructional league. Each of his other three pitches—curveball, slider and changeup—grades as at least average. He should start this year at high Class A Tampa and could zoom through the minor leagues.

TREVOR STORY | SS, Rockies

With Troy Tulowitzki dealt to the Blue Jays last summer and no long-term answer at second base, Story's path to Denver is clear. The Rockies added him to the 40-man roster this past offseason after clubbing a combined 40 doubles and 20 homers between Double-A and Triple-A. He has a chance to stick at shortstop but also has experience at second and third base and could get to the majors this year.

DYLAN CEASE | RHP, Cubs

Cease had Tommy John surgery just before the Cubs drafted him in 2014, and got back on the mound late last season for 11 appearances in the Rookie-level Arizona League. Despite his modest frame, Cease uses a whip-quick arm to produce upper-90s heat and a low-80s curveball with the shape and bite to project as better than average. His changeup is a work in progress, and this season should go a long way toward measuring where he is post-surgery. If his stuff has come all the way back over a full-season workload, he could shoot up this list.

JOSH NAYLOR | 1B, Marlins

The Marlins' system is a wasteland right now, but a big year from Naylor could go a long way toward ameliorating that situation. Miami popped the hulking Canadian in the first round



Trevor Story's power could help Colorado in the not-too-distant future

of the 2015 draft in large part because of his top-grade raw power, and he rewarded their faith with a strong showing in the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League. The Marlins believe he'll produce average to go with his power, and he'll start trying to prove them right in 2016 at low Class A Greensboro.

GARRETT WHITLEY | OF, Rays

One of the toolsiest players in the 2015 draft, Whitley had long been on the Rays' radar and they took him with their first-round selection. The numbers didn't jump off the page in his pro debut, but his 21-to-37 walk-to-strikeout ratio was impressive. Tampa Bay believes in his power potential because of his big-time bat speed. His plus run tool also serves him well in center field. He could jump into the Top 100 next season with a strong showing at low Class A Bowling Green.

VLADIMIR GUERRERO JR. | 3B/OF, Blue Jays

The son of the longtime major league outfielder and 2004 AL MVP, the Blue Jays gave Guerrero \$3.9 million for his immense power potential. He's built differently than his dad, but he's got some of the same attributes—bat speed, hand strength, hand-eye coordination—and is a similarly lethal weapon on pitches anywhere in or out of the strike zone. Even though he was an outfielder when he signed, the Blue Jays are trying Guerrero at third base and will keep him there for now. If he outgrows the position, he'll slide back to the outfield.

IN BUT COULD JUMP

These five prospects made the back end of the 2016 Top 100 Prospects list but could climb into the Top 50 in 2017.

BOBBY BRADLEY | 1B, Indians

Bradley checked in at No. 93 on this year's list after a season for the ages in the low Class A Midwest League. His 27 home runs with Lake County were the fourth-most for a teenager in the MWL in the last 50 years. His raw juice translates well in games, and the Indians believe in his ability to hit for both average and power on his way toward a future as an everyday first baseman. He struck out 32 percent of the time in 2015, but the Indians think that will improve as he matures.

MICHAEL KOPECH | RHP, Red Sox

Unfortunately, Kopech's 2015 season will be remembered more for his positive test for an amphetamine than what he did on the field before the 50-game suspension. With low Class A Greenville, Kopech showed off an explosive combination high-90s fastball and an above-average but inconsistent breaking ball. With those two pitches, plus a developing changeup, Kopech racked up nearly 10 strikeouts per nine innings and held hitters to a .228 average. If he improves his command he could make a major leap from his current spot at No. 89 on this list.

BRENT HONEYWELL | RHP, Rays

Already at No. 65 on this year's Top 100, Honeywell could jump into the top tier if he dominates his first test at Double-A. Using a combination of mid-90s fastball, changeup, curveball and screwball, Honeywell carved up both A-ball levels. He whiffed nearly a hitter an inning, walked just 27 in 130 frames and showed tremendous confidence on the mound. He's likely to reach Double-A as a 21-year-old, and how he fares against more advanced competition will go a long way toward his placement on next year's list.

BRADY AIKEN | LHP, Indians

Perhaps the biggest wild card on this year's Top 100, Aiken's story is well known. He was taken No. 1 overall by the Astros but squabbles over the health of his left arm led him to become the first top draft pick to not sign in three decades. He attended the IMG Academy as a post-grad and after just 13 pitches in his first start tore the UCL in his left elbow and had Tommy John surgery. Despite that, the Indians drafted him No. 17 overall in 2015. He's gotten back on the mound now, and made this year's list on the strength of his potential. When he's right, he fronts his four-pitch mix with a fastball that has peaked at 97 mph and a plus curveball. With a strong debut in pro ball he could move way up from his current spot at No. 71 on the Top 100.

IAN HAPP | 2B/OF, Cubs

Continuing their recent trend of taking polished college bats (see: Bryant, Kris and Schwarber, Kyle), the Cubs used their first-round pick in 2015 on Cincinnati's Happ. He ripped through the first pro stop at short-season Eugene before moving to low Class A South Bend. He fared well in the Midwest League and showed a polished and explosive swing from both sides of the plate. He jumped around the diamond in college but has played solely outfield as a pro. He moved to sec-

ond base during the fall instructional league, and he'll get a long look there this season. He ranks at No. 87 on this year's Top 100 but could move way up with a strong first full look as a pro.

IN LAST YEAR, OUT THIS YEAR

Not everyone from the 2015 Top 100 Prospects who is still prospect eligible made it back onto the list this year. We catch up with why some of last year's top prospects fell off this year's list.

HUNTER HARVEY |

DYLAN BUNDY | RHPs, Orioles

Both Bundy and Harvey still have potential. Problem is, they haven't been healthy enough to get on the mound much. Harvey missed all of 2015 and hasn't pitched in a game since July 25, 2014. Although he didn't have surgery, he spent all of 2015 tormented by elbow issues that also kept him out of a scheduled stint in the Arizona Fall League. Bundy reached the majors in 2012 but has thrown just 65 innings since then. He's had Tommy John surgery, then missed time with an oblique strain, and then had surgery to remove calcified masses from behind his right shoulder. Bundy threw two innings in the AFL, but felt stiffness in his arm and was shut down. Bundy is out of options, making his future role even murkier.

TYLER KOLEK | RHP, Marlins

After becoming the highest-drafted high school righthander ever on the strength of one of the hardest-recorded fastballs in draft history, Kolek struggled mightily in his first full pro season. His heater was inconsistent, showing flashes of its pre-draft form but at times sitting in the low-90s. Moreover, neither of his offspeed pitches—a slider and a changeup—proved to be an effective weapon against low Class A hitters. He walked 61 in 109 innings and struck out just 81. For a pitcher with a famously monstrous arsenal, the Marlins certainly were expecting more.

MARK APPEL | RHP, Phillies

Appel, the No. 1 pick in the 2013 draft, has spent the entirety of his pro career as an enigma. He's still got the dynamic fastball-slider-changeup combination that earned him tons of hype out of Stanford, but he rarely combines it with the requisite command to dominate. Moreover, the fastball lacks explosiveness, and hitters are way too comfortable in the box against Appel. He was dealt to the Phillies as part of the haul for Ken Giles and will hope a change of scenery improves both his stock and results.

ALEX JACKSON |

D.J. PETERSON | OF/1B, Mariners

The Mariners' system is bereft, and bad season from two former first-rounders only made things worse. Jackson struggled terribly at low Class A Clinton—producing a ghastly .453 OPS—before moving down to short-season Everett and rebounding a bit. Peterson started the year at Double-A Jackson and OPSed just .636 but was still promoted at midseason to Triple-A Tacoma, where he fared no better. That's especially troubling considering he's shifted over to first base, where all of his value will be tied to his bat. Jackson will return to the Midwest League to try make up for lost time after his early issues as a pro.

REESE MCGUIRE | C, Pirates

Make no mistake about it: McGuire is still as highly regarded as a catcher as he was coming out of the 2013 draft, when the Pirates popped him at No. 13 overall. His bat, however, hasn't caught up to his glove. He hit .254/.301/.294 with high Class A Bradenton, a figure that's in the same range as what he produced in low Class A West Virginia a year prior. He'll move to Double-A Altoona this year with the hope that his bat will improve away from the pitcher's paradise of the Florida State League. McGuire's defense should get him to the big leagues but to be a regular, he'll have to hit more.

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Mancini, Walker ready behind Davis

BALTIMORE | Orioles

BY ROCH KUBATKO



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

BALTIMORE By re-signing Chris Davis to a seven-year, \$161 million contract, the Orioles raised questions about the futures of minor league first basemen **Christian Walker** and **Trey Mancini**.

Is one of them expendable, perhaps leading to a trade? Could they co-exist at Triple-A Norfolk this summer, alternating between first base and DH? Could they try their hand in the outfield?

Walker was the organization's minor league player of the year in 2014. Mancini won the award last season. They're two of the top position prospects in the organization, but they're

blocked by Davis.

Orioles manager **Buck Showalter** isn't endorsing a trade.

"It's like when someone says, 'Geez, if you like Mancini, why don't you trade Christian Walker? If you like Christian Walker, why don't you trade Trey Mancini?' OK, that's fine," Showalter said. "But the other club says, 'We won't do that. We don't like that guy.'"

"We all have these convenient trades that we supposedly have a surplus of that can bring back this, that and whatever. It doesn't work that way. That's why you see so many three-way trades made with clubs, because it's easier to work out."

The Orioles selected Mancini, 23, in the eighth round of the 2013 draft out of Notre Dame. He batted a combined .341/.375/.563 with 43 doubles, six triples, 21 home runs and 89 RBIs in 533 at-bats between high Class A Frederick and Double-A Bowie.

"You could make a case that he had prob-

ably one of the top three statistical years of any position player in the minor leagues all over baseball, and some of the people don't want to give him that credit," Showalter said.

"He's got a lot of want-to. He really wants this to happen. He comes from a good family down in central Florida. And keep in mind our complex is in Sarasota. He went all the way across the country to work with **Brady (Anderson)**. He doesn't even know he's coming to big league camp yet, but he's coming to big league camp."

BIRD SEED

■ The Orioles purchased first baseman/corner outfielder **Efren Navarro** from the Angels in January. The lefthanded batter has hit .246/.303/.324 in parts of four seasons in the big leagues and is known best for his defense at first base.

■ Lefthanded reliever **Zack Dodson**, whom Baltimore signed as a minor league free agent in December, earned a 100-game suspension without pay for a third career positive test for a drug of abuse.



Trey Mancini

MIKE JAMES

BOSTON | Red Sox

BY ALEX SPEIER

Johnson Ready To Rebound

BOSTON On the surface, **Brian Johnson's** 2015 season appeared dominant. In 18 Triple-A starts, he went 9-6, 2.53 and showed the poise, pitch mix, command, and feel to convince most evaluators that he represented a solid bet to be a major league starter.

Yet behind his effectiveness, something seemed amiss at times. Whereas Johnson sat at 90-91 mph for much of his breakout 2014 campaign, his fastball lost a couple ticks in 2015, often sitting at 88-89 mph. The lefthander also found that his signature fastball command sometimes wasn't present.

Johnson's season ended in early August when he was diagnosed with ulnar nerve irritation. In hindsight, he understands how the condition impacted him.

"I don't even know if there was a certain time when it started, but it was there. It's probably my fault for not saying anything," said Johnson. "I didn't have the fastball command that I've always relied on. I was having to throw a 2-0 or 3-0 slider just to find my slot because of the nerve issue, with my hand going numb."

While Johnson had positioned himself for an audition in the Red Sox' big league rotation over the final two months, the injury instead became sufficiently acute that his season was done in early August.

Now, Johnson is entering his second big league camp with a clean bill of health, having started throwing off the mound in January. While his inability to pitch down the stretch in 2015 effectively prevented him from being considered a candidate for the season-opening big league rotation, Johnson is more focused on the fact that he'll be able to pitch than on the specifics of his assignment.

"I'm going to go out there (in spring training), put my head down, and work as hard as I can, like I always do," said Johnson. "You never know what can happen. That's how I look at it. Crazier things have happened where things can work out for me."

SOX YARNS

■ The Red Sox and low Class A Greenville extended their player-development contract through 2020.

■ Former Red Sox outfielder **Shaq Thompson**, a 2012 18th-rounder who went 0-for-39 in the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League, reached the Super Bowl as a linebacker for the Carolina Panthers.

NEW YORK | Yankees

BY GEORGE KING

Kaprielian Begins His Journey

NEW YORK With their top picks in the 2014 and 2015 drafts, the Yankees selected lefthander **Jacob Lindgren** and righthander **James Kaprielian** out of major college programs—but that's where the similarities end.

Lindgren attended Mississippi State, where he worked as a reliever, when New York made him a second-round pick in 2014. The Yankees invited him to big league spring training in 2015.

Kaprielian, a starter at UCLA whom New York selected 16th overall in 2015, also received a big league invite as he embarked on his first attempt at full-season ball.

Due to the nature of the two pitchers' roles, however, Kaprielian probably will not reach the majors in his second pro season. That's what Lindgren did in 2015 when he appeared in seven games with the Yankees before having late-June surgery to remove a bone spur in the left elbow.

"Relievers are different," general manager **Brian Cashman** said of Lindgren, who appeared in 15 games at Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre in 2015, where he recorded a 1.23 ERA and fanned 29 in 22 innings against 10 walks. "It's easier to project innings versus a starter."

"(Starters) have to toe the rubber for six innings every five days."

The 22-year-old Kaprielian struck out 14 and walked four in 11 innings last summer, reaching short-season Staten Island. He then shined in the New York-Penn League playoffs by recording an 0.73 ERA in two starts while striking out 10 in 12 innings.

"He dipped his toe in the water, (but) there is not enough information," Cashman said when asked if Kaprielian could surface in the big leagues in 2016.

At this time last year, the Yankees devised a plan that would allow No. 1 prospect **Luis Severino** to manage his minor league innings so that the righthander could pitch in the big leagues without exceeding his workload ceiling.

YANKEE DOODLES

■ The Yankees signed former Phillies righthander **Tyler Cloyd** to a minor league deal. He pitched for Samsung of the Korean Baseball League.

■ **Jeff Deardorff**, a longtime Yankees area scout in Florida, has been promoted to a new role as a hitting analyst on the amateur side of the scouting department.

TAMPA BAY | Rays

BY MARC TOPKIN

Rondon Continues To Work

ST. PETERSBURG While most of the 20 young prospects invited to the Rays annual mid-January winter development camp jetted back home for another few weeks of rest, **Adrian Rondon** was headed to Port Charlotte to continue offseason workouts.

Signed to a nearly \$3 million bonus just after turning 16 in July 2014, Rondon has been understandably slow to develop, so the Rays figured the extra work could help and the native of San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic, was all for it.

"There's a lot of things I can work on," Rondon said through team interpreter **George Pappas**. "I'm grateful for the opportunity to stick around. I'm grateful for the staff and everybody who wants to help me. So I thank God for the opportunity and look forward to getting better."

Rondon's first pro season wasn't much, as he hit .166/.256/.234 in 43 Rookie-level Gulf Coast League with no homers and nine errors, and missed time with injuries.

"It was a very difficult season for me, the first year here," he said. "I had a lot of things to work on so that was a difficult experience. But I look forward to working hard so I can improve the areas of my game that need work and I can continue to move forward in our organization."

Rays farm director **Mitch Lukevics** said it has to be pointed out that Rondon was being asked to handle a lot of change—in lifestyle as well as level of competition—at a young age.

"I think if you look at his stats, he struggled," said Lukevics, who worked previously for the Yankees as a talented young shortstop. "But I remember Derek Jeter—and I'm not comparing him to Derek Jeter—but I remember Jeter hit .202 his first year (in the GCL) and he got a couple hits on the last day to get there."

COOL RAYS

■ The Rays will have all minor leaguers report to spring training on the same day, March 4, rather than having the pitcher and catchers ahead of the position players. Lukevics said it will make for more efficient and beneficial workouts since many of the players were in Port Charlotte, Fla., by then anyway.

■ Righthander **German Marquez** had a short stay on the 40-man roster. Added in November ahead of two players the Rays lost in the Rule 5 draft, Marquez joined the Rockies in January as part of the Rays' trade for **Corey Dickerson**.

TORONTO | Blue Jays

BY SHI DAVIDI

Prospects Earn Spring Invites

TORONTO General manager **Ross Atkins** believes there are two key areas of focus when deciding which non-roster prospects get invited to big-league spring training.

"One is making your team better, obviously, so if there's a chance for someone to impact your team that year, it can be seen as an orientation and a familiarization with the coaching staff, with the players on it, and certainly a more extended preparation," he explains. "Two is just effort, who's earned it from an effort standpoint, who's been the most consistently professional."

The Blue Jays are bringing 14 non-roster prospects to their camp this month, with first baseman **Rowdy Tellez**, righthander **Conner Greene** and shortstop **Richard Urena** among the first-timers. Center fielder **Anthony Alford** is headed to his second big-league spring training, arriving this time as the rising five-tool talent scouts have long projected him to be.

Beyond the obvious goals for any player at camp, something more subtle Atkins looks for from his youngsters is that they "show a respect and understanding for the environment that they're in."

"There are essentially three groups of players that are in a major league spring training," Atkins continues. "There are the players that know they're going to be on the team, they're getting ready. There's a group of players competing to try and make the team, and then there's a group that are typically just getting exposure. ... The emphasis we're placing and we're looking for from a young minor league player is that they understand those roles."

As for evaluating their performance in camp, Atkins describes spring training as a "terrible time" to make assessments, although for young players, how they fare may carry a bit more consideration "because the learning curve is so much steeper."

JAYS CHATTER

■ The Blue Jays promoted pitching coach **Bob Stanley** to Triple-A Buffalo from Double-A New Hampshire. He'll serve with returning manager **Gary Allenson** and hitting coach **Richie Hebner**. Stanley served as bullpen coach for the Blue Jays in 2014.

■ Pitching coach **Vince Horsman** was promoted to New Hampshire from high Class A Dunedin. He joins manager **Bobby Meacham** and hitting coach **Stubby Clapp**, who both return for another season with the Fisher Cats.

Thrill of hitting drew Phils' Williams

PHILADELPHIA | Phillies

BY JIM SALISBURY



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

PHILADELPHIA Nick Williams' first love was football. He was a good enough high school player in Galveston, Texas, to attract interest as a receiver from several top college programs.

So why is Williams now one of the most exciting prospects in a restocked Phillies' system?

"Hitting is, I think, what kept me out of football," the 6-foot-3, 200-pound outfielder said. "Football is what I wanted to do. I wanted to be in the NFL. But hitting a baseball—there's just something about it. I love defense, too. I love taking hits away and making 'wow'

plays. But there's something about hitting. Get a good hit, it's like, 'All right, I won this battle with the pitcher.' I think of it as competition with the other team's pitching."

Williams, who turned 22 in September, was part of the Phillies' haul in the deal that sent **Cole Hamels** to Texas in July. The second-round pick in 2012 improved his plate discipline and hit .303/.354/.491 with 17 homers and 55 RBIs in 119 games at Double-A last season. He will move to Triple-A in 2016 and is expected to be joined, at least at some point in the season, by a bevy of prospects that includes shortstop **J.P. Crawford**, catchers **Andrew Knapp** and **Jorge Alfaro** and righthanders **Jake Thompson**, **Mark Appel** and **Zach Eflin**.

This group will be in big league spring training camp and could be ready for Philadelphia in a year.

"Everything came together for Nick last year," farm director **Joe Jordan** said. "In

talking with him, I think he got to the point where he trusted his ability, didn't force it and let the game come to him. He was terrific in August. We're looking forward to getting him back in uniform and going again."

The plan is for Williams to play center field and left field at Triple-A.

Williams bonded quickly with the Phillies' other young prospects and believes the rebuild could move quickly.

"It just feels right," he said. "I'm almost positive that we're going to be good in the next few years. There's too much talent."

PHIL-UPS

■ Power-armed righthander **Alberto Tirado**, acquired from the Blue Jays in July, will be used as a starter in 2016. He pitched 40 games in relief in the high Class A Florida State League last year.

■ The Phillies will field two teams in the Dominican Summer League this year, a result of the Venezuelan Summer League's shutdown.



Nick Williams

CARL KLINE

ATLANTA | Braves

BY BILL BALLEW

Embarrassment Of Riches

ATLANTA The Braves enter spring training with more questions than answers regarding their big league rotation. A similar situation will unfold at the Class A levels, although those issues involve an excess of options as opposed to a perceived lack of depth.

Numerous trades made over the past two years as well as an impressive 2015 draft class could create a logjam at high Class A Carolina and low Class A Rome. The Braves realize these situations have a way of working out, but the possibilities are intriguing.

"Rome could be so loaded that several guys will end up in extended spring training," said Braves general manager **John Coppolella**. "There's a chance some guys may get frustrated, but it also creates competition, which is something every organization hopes to have in their farm system."

The traffic jam could start with a trickle-down effect, beginning with the development—or lack thereof—shown by the likes of **Rob Whalen**, **Zack Bird** and **Wes Parsons** during spring training. Whalen is the most likely of the three to make a jump to Double-A Mississippi.

Other strong candidates for the Carolina rotation include **Seth Furney**, **Caleb Beech** and **Zack Quintana**, all of whom pitched well at Rome last year, and **Tyler Brosius**, who did not take the mound after being injured in the Mudcats' bus wreck in early May.

Another pitcher on the bubble between the Carolina and South Atlantic leagues is **Touki Toussaint**, who has struggled with his control as a professional after being drafted in the first round by Arizona in 2014.

As far as the 2015 draft class is concerned, **Kolby Allard**, the 15th overall selection, is coming off back surgery, making his starting point for the season uncertain. Fellow first-rounder **Mike Soroka** should earn a job in the Rome rotation, while second-round pick **A.J. Minter** is coming off the Tommy John surgery he had last March at Texas A&M.

WIGWAM WISPS

■ Braves bullpen coach **Eddie Perez** managed Aragua to the Venezuelan Winter League title after trailing two games to none in the championship series.

■ Righthander **Mike Foltyniewicz** continues to make steady progress after having surgery to have a rib removed, though he'll enter spring training a couple of weeks behind on his normal throwing program.

MIAMI | Marlins

BY WALTER VILLA

Riddle Me This

MIAMI It's just a 15-hour trip, but it's been 15 years in the making for **J.T. Riddle**, who will drive his Ford F-150 pickup truck from Lexington, Ky., to Jupiter, Fla.

Once the Marlins' 6-foot-3, 175-pound infielder arrives at Roger Dean Stadium on Feb. 21, he will be ready to live a dream come true—his first major league camp.

"It's a big honor," said Riddle, 24. "This is something I've been working toward since middle school, and to finally be so close is an awesome feeling."

The Red Sox selected Riddle out of Western Hills High in Frankfurt, Ky., in the 35th round in 2010. Riddle went instead to college at Kentucky, where he played mostly second base but also some right field.

Miami signed Riddle in 2013 after drafting him in the 13th round, and last season was his breakthrough year as he made it to Double-A and even got five plate appearances at Triple-A (2-for-3 with two walks).

"Once you get to Double-A, you feel like you're almost there," said Riddle, who played shortstop exclusively for the past year-plus but had prior experience at third base and second. After enjoying his time in low Class A Greensboro—where crowds of 8,000 were common—Riddle said he couldn't wait to get out of the high Class A Florida State League.

"The ball flies in Greensboro and then you go to big (FSL) stadiums, and the ball goes nowhere," Riddle said. "Plus, it's hot, and there are maybe 200 or 500 fans in the stands."

Riddle hit .270/.311/.314 in 45 games at Jupiter and improved when he got promoted to Double-A Jacksonville (.289/.323/.422).

With the obvious "Riddler" nickname, Riddle opens up lots of possibilities for creative promotion people at the ballpark, but that's not the only reason he's well-liked.

"He's a really good athlete with range at shortstop," said **Brian Schneider**, Riddle's manager at Jupiter. "He needs to fill out more, but a manager never has to worry about him. He quietly gets the job done."

FISH BITES

■ Catcher **Adrian Nieto**, 26, signed with the Marlins and is a non-roster invitee to camp. Nieto played his high school ball in South Florida before being a fifth-round pick in 2008.

■ Righty-hitting first baseman **Xavier Scruggs**, 28, is another non-roster invitee. Miami could be in the market for a platoon to go with lefty-hitting first baseman **Justin Bour**.

NEW YORK | Mets

BY ADAM RUBIN

Carrillo Catching On

NEW YORK Xorge Carrillo roomed with **Jacob deGrom** as teammates with Double-A Binghamton. Carrillo also caught **Noah Syndergaard** and **Steven Matz** with the Eastern League club. And while Carrillo may be blocked from joining them at the major league level right now by **Travis d'Arnaud** and **Kevin Plawecki**, Carrillo did have a breakout year power-wise in 2015 and is knocking on the door of a major league career.

In his first full season as a starting catcher, Carrillo hit .240/.318/.382 with 10 homers and 40 RBIs in 325 at-bats last year. After being drafted in the 14th round in 2011 out of Arizona State, Carrillo had produced only five total homers in his first four pro seasons.

Still, Carrillo added: "I don't think the .240 is really me. I think that I could do better than that. But it was my first year catching every day. I went through some downs."

Carrillo followed up his solid season with the B-Mets by again catching with Mexicali in his native Mexico this winter. Carrillo moved to Phoenix at age 15 with his family.

He is particularly known for his catching skills. He threw out 30 of 90 would-be base stealers in 2015 with Binghamton.

"I really take pride in calling the game, handling the staff, each starter, each bullpen guy," Carrillo said. "I like to have a goal—everybody has a below-3.00 ERA with my starters and a below-4.00 ERA with my relievers. That's what I like to go by. I feel really proud about blocking, throwing guys out. The defense, all around, I think is my best attribute."

Carrillo has received an invite to major league camp for spring training for the second straight year. He said he received sound advice from **Curtis Granderson** in camp in 2015.

"I was having trouble just because I'm not a big home run guy in BP," Carrillo said. "It just doesn't happen to me. I talked to Curtis, and Curtis was the same way. So he gave me some advice. He said, 'Don't worry about that, because they don't count in BP.'"

METAMORPHOSES

■ Outfielder **Brandon Nimmo**, a 2011 first-round pick, suffered a partial tear to a tendon in his left foot and was fitted with a walking boot in late January.

■ The return of **Yoenis Cespedes** cost outfield prospect **Darrell Ceciliani** his 40-man roster spot. The Mets sold him to Toronto subsequent to designating him for assignment.

WASHINGTON | Nationals

BY LACY LUSK

A Wise Mind

WASHINGTON Rhett Wiseman only thought he was playing every day when he was helping Vanderbilt win a College World Series title in 2014 and then make it back to the finals last year. He found out differently after playing in the short-season New York-Penn League.

Though the third-round pick had what Nationals farm director **Mark Scialabba** called "a solid start to his professional career," Wiseman knew he had work to do after the Auburn Doubledays' season ended. He started simplifying his swing in instructional league and was putting in more work this offseason in San Diego with **Troy Gingrich**, the organization's hitting coordinator.

"It was a pretty long season transitioning right from the CWS to pro ball," Wiseman said. "But your swing's always changing with your body. At Vandy, the biggest thing was having a couple of days off and being able to work on things. Now I've moved myself in position where I have more of a line-drive approach, using the entire field."

Wiseman, a 21-year-old lefthanded hitter, had .248/.307/.376 numbers in 210 at-bats for Auburn while stealing six bases in eight attempts. He played right field, as he did in his final year with the Commodores after previously playing all three outfield positions.

"He's a fiery, competitive athlete that is beginning to show the ability to make adjustments—a coachable young man with a great attitude," Scialabba said.

Wiseman has shown leadership since he was school president in high school as a junior and senior.

"That feels like so long ago," said Wiseman.

On the field, the 6-foot, 200-pound Wiseman is doing plenty to impress Nationals officials.

"He has a very strong, physical frame, utilizes his above-average speed well and plays the game the right way," Scialabba said. "He has good instincts in the outfield, covers a lot of ground and has a solid-average arm."

CAPITAL GAINS

■ Double-A Harrisburg announced that it will share Metro Bank Park with the City Islanders of the United Soccer League. The soccer team will play 10 of its 15 home games in the stadium.

■ Outfielder **Brian Goodwin**, a 25-year-old who struggled at Harrisburg last season, had a big winter with Margarita in the Venezuelan League. He hit .316/.401/.459 in 133 at-bats.

Alvarez again aiming to beat odds

CHICAGO | White Sox

BY SCOT GREGOR



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

CHICAGO Shortstop **Eddy Alvarez** is a 26-year-old prospect with dreams of making it to the major leagues despite spending most of 2015 at low Class A Kannapolis.

The odds are seemingly stacked against him, but Alvarez has experience rising above challenges.

"How realistic is a Miami boy making it to the Winter Olympics?" Alvarez said. "Anything in this world is possible, and I like to think I'm a testament to that. So yeah, the big leagues for me is there."

After earning all-conference honors as a shortstop for Salt Lake CC in 2011, Alvarez

decided to drop baseball and concentrate on speed skating.

"It was three years of training for six, eight hours a day, six days a week," he said.

All of the hard work paid off, and Alvarez won a silver medal in the 5,000-meter relay at the 2014 Winter Olympics.

After hanging up the skates, Alvarez caught the baseball bug again, and with the help of family friend Carlos Castillo, who pitched for the White Sox from 1997-99, he signed a minor league contract in June 2014.

"I'm not going to lie, the transition was difficult," Alvarez said. "But thankfully, I had a very strong lower base and in my opinion, the swing relies a lot on the lower half. I just needed to get a little bit more upper body strength."

After beginning his first pro season in the Rookie-level Arizona League in 2014, Alvarez opened eyes last year after hitting .296/.409/.424 at Kannapolis and high Class

A Winston-Salem. He also stole 53 bases.

"I was very, very happy, but there's always room for improvement," he said. "I took last season as a building year for me."

While he played 119 games at shortstop last year, Alvarez also played four games at second base with Winston-Salem.

"I actually thought I was going to be a second baseman coming into this organization," Alvarez said. "But they saw me play some shortstop and they liked what they saw. I struggled a little bit during the middle of last season but again, it's a learning process."

CHI-LITES

■ The White Sox issued 20 non-roster invites to spring training, and the list includes minor league free agents such as righty **Phillippe Aumont**, catcher **Hector Sanchez** and infielders **Steve Lombardozzi** and **Andy Parrino**.

■ **Micker Adolfo**, a 19-year-old right fielder who had surgery last August after breaking his left ankle, is on track to play for Kannapolis at some point this season.



Eddy Alvarez

RODGER WOOD

CLEVELAND | Indians

BY JIM INGRAHAM

Indians outfield in transition

CLEVELAND This is clearly a year of transition for the Indians' outfield. Only two of the eight outfielders on the team's 40-man roster have been everyday outfielders for a full big league season.

Those two are **Michael Brantley** and **Rajai Davis**. The other six are **Abraham Almonte**, **Joey Butler**, **Lonnie Chisenhall**, **Collin Cowgill**, **Tyler Naquin** and **James Ramsey**.

Barring any late additions, the stable of outfielders the Indians will bring to spring training, with the exception of Brantley, is not a high-profile group.

A case could be made that the two most interesting Indians outfielders won't be in the major league camp at all. At least not officially.

Bradley Zimmer and **Clint Frazier**, the club's top two prospects, are not among the minor leaguers who have been invited to the big league camp as non-roster players.

That's not necessarily a surprise since Zimmer has yet to see a pitch at the Triple-A level and Frazier hasn't had an at bat at the Double-A level. However, Indians officials seem intent on clearing a path to the big leagues for both young outfielders when they are ready.

It started with last year's trades of **Nick Swisher**, **Michael Bourn**, **David Murphy** and **Brandon Moss** and continued over the winter with the signing of Davis, a free agent, to a modest one-year contract.

General manager **Mike Chernoff** downplayed the significance of Zimmer and/or Frazier not being among those invited to the big league camp.

"It's not an issue with the seasons they had, who they are, or the progress they made," Chernoff said. "The decision not to bring them to camp is instead just about the depth we have in our major league clubhouse and on our roster in the outfield. You kind of always strike this balance of, when you have guys in camp, making sure there is enough opportunity for them."

SMOKE SIGNALS

■ **Koby Perez** has been promoted from international cross-checker to director of Latin American scouting. He replaces **Ramon Pena**, who left the organization.

■ Minor league pitchers **Adam Plutko** and **Will Roberts** and infielders **Todd Hankins** and **Eric Stamets** have been invited to the major league camp as non-roster players.

DETROIT | Tigers

BY CHRIS IOTT

Tigers not counting Moya out

DETROIT There good news for power-hitting right fielder **Steven Moya** is that he posted solid numbers while playing in the Dominican League this winter.

The bad news is that a big league roster spot will be quite difficult to come by this spring. The Tigers signed **Justin Upton** to a lucrative six-year deal and will have nine outfielders with big league experience in camp.

But general manager **Al Avila** warned against overlooking Moya.

"Moya had a very good winter," Avila said. "If he continues in Toledo where he left off in winter ball, then he will be on his way to playing in the big leagues."

Moya, 24, was listed at or near the top of the team's prospects list for several years, but slipped out of the top 10 this year. He has impressive power and a strong arm but has struggled to develop plate discipline.

Moya hit 20 home runs and knocked in 74 runs in 2015, his first season at Triple-A Toledo. But he also hit just .240/.283/.420 and had 162 strikeouts and 27 walks in 535 plate appearances. Moya has a .249 average, a .733 OPS and 750 strikeouts in 606 games in seven seasons in the minors.

Moya's numbers while playing winter ball for Toros del Este were much improved, albeit in a small sample size. He hit .298/.350/.466 with 34 strikeouts and 10 walks. Those 34 strikeouts in 131 at-bats mean he still struck out about a quarter of the time, but that does represent an improvement on his career 32 percent strike out rate.

Yoenis Cespedes was traded during the 2015 season and **Rajai Davis** hit the market as a free agent at the end of the season, which left the Tigers a bit thin in the outfield. But they have added **Cameron Maybin**, **Mike Aviles** and, now, **Upton**, to go with **J.D. Martinez**, **Anthony Gose** and **Tyler Collins**.

Moya will have an uphill battle this spring to make the big league roster as a power bat off the bench. But if he swings the bat this spring like he did this winter, he has a shot.

TIGER TALES

■ Lefthander **Daniel Norris** is 100 percent and ready for spring after undergoing offseason surgery to deal with thyroid cancer.

■ The chikungunya virus put an early end to reliever **Bruce Rondon's** Venezuelan League season and kept him away from the team's annual winter caravan in late January.

KANSAS CITY | Royals

BY ALAN ESKEW

Alvarez seizes opportunity

KANSAS CITY **Matt Alvarez** possesses a major league arm with a plus fastball, but that did not transform into success at Boston College.

Alvarez brandished 5.88, 5.91 and 5.60 ERAs mostly as a reliever and not surprisingly went undrafted in 2013.

Pitching that summer for Staten Island, Alvarez was rated the No. 1 prospect in the Atlantic Collegiate Baseball League with a 93-96 mile per hour fastball and a 90 mph cutter. The Royals signed the 6-2, 190-pound righthander on Aug. 8 and dispatched Alvarez to Idaho Falls.

Alvarez posted a 6.75 ERA in six appearances with the Chukars. The next season he went 5-7 with a 5.15 ERA in 30 games, including seven starts, with low Class A Lexington.

In 2015, Alvarez turned it around with high Class A Wilmington, ended the year in the Arizona Fall League and inserted his name into the Royals' prospect radar.

Alvarez went 2-2 with a 3.66 ERA in 32 relief outings with the Blue Rocks, striking out 49 in 52 innings.

"He's a nondrafted guy. I love those guys," said Royals minor league pitching coach **Carlos Reyes**, who worked with Alvarez in the AFL. "I wasn't a drafted kid (out of Florida Southern and pitched eight years in the majors). A lot of those guys are hungry."

Alvarez was in the instructional league when **Bryan Brickhouse** left the Saguaros with an injury. The Royals wanted to test Alvarez against stiffer competition and he moved seamlessly to the AFL, not allowing a run in three appearances while recording 10 outs.

"He's got a plus fastball, 94-95-96, slider and changeup," Reyes said. "He's got good stuff, goes after you, competes."

Alvarez, 25, will likely begin this season with Double-A Northwest Arkansas.

"He's going to come in aggressive with his plus fastball and locates his fastball well," Royals director of minor league operations **Ronnie Richardson** said.

ROYALTIES

■ The Royals forfeited their first-round pick in 2016 after signing righthander **Ian Kennedy** and will have only one selection—67th overall—among the top 100.

■ Third baseman **Hunter Dozier**, 2013 first-round pick, and lefthander **Sam Selman**, 2012 second-round pick, are among the non-roster invitees to spring training.

MINNESOTA | Twins

BY PHIL MILLER

Twins see role for Meneses

MINNEAPOLIS Is it possible for a player to be a "prospect" if his team envisions him as a bench player? Absolutely, the Twins say. That's why they have **Heiker Meneses**.

The 24-year-old Venezuelan already has eight seasons of professional experience, yet doesn't have a settled position. That's by design. If he reaches Minnesota, the Twins figure, he'll be playing several different positions.

"Not every guy projects as a regular, or as a star," said **Mike Radcliff**, the Twins' vice president for player personnel. "Meneses has a decent chance to impact the major league team, but he'll do it by being ready to play all over the diamond."

Staying ready has been the tricky part. Meneses is a solid infield defender and a relative veteran at Double-A, so the Twins had to remind Chattanooga manager **Doug Mientkiewicz** to move Meneses around.

"If it was up to Doug, Meneses would have started at short every day, because he trusts him to do a good job," Radcliff said. "Maybe that's better for winning games right now, but we want him to keep his versatility, because that's the trait that will get him to the majors."

He almost got there with the Red Sox. Meneses signed with Boston as a 16-year-old in 2008, and by 2013, climbed to Triple-A Pawtucket. But the Twins signed him away last winter, and Meneses played a big role in Chattanooga's 2015 Southern League championship, starting more games in the Lookouts' infield than any other player.

He batted .259/.317/.300, too—so-so for a top prospect but, combined with his trustworthy glove, enough to convince the Twins that Meneses could get to Minnesota soon.

"With fewer bench players these days, versatility is important. His best skills are defense, reliability, dependability," Radcliff said. "If you make someone a utility guy, they're not always happy about it. But we've shown him that he's got an opportunity here, and he's taking advantage."

TWIN KILLINGS

■ The Twins claimed lefthander **Michael Strong**, who attended the same Minnesota high school as Twins closer **Glen Perkins**, off waivers from the Marlins.

■ Former all-star **Carlos Quentin**, who appeared headed to retirement after playing just five games with Seattle's Triple-A Tacoma affiliate in 2015, signed a minor league contract worth \$750,000 if he makes the Twins' roster.

Hader gets invite after dazzling in AFL

MILWAUKEE | Brewers

BY TOM HAUDRICOURT



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

MILWAUKEE To say it has been all good for **Josh Hader** since he joined the Brewers organization is an understatement, to say the least.

The 21-year-old lefthander was highly regarded when he was one of four prospects acquired from Houston in late July in exchange for center fielder **Carlos Gomez** and righthander **Mike Fiers**. But Hader took his game to another level after that trade, quickly rising up the ranks of prospect lists for the entire minor leagues.

Hader was 3-3, 3.17 in 17 games (10 starts) at Double-A Corpus Christi while still in the Astros' system but was even better after the

Brewers assigned him to Double-A Biloxi. In seven starts there, he compiled a 2.79 ERA with 50 strikeouts in 39 innings and 0.98 WHIP.

But it was Hader's stint afterward in the Arizona Fall League that really had scouts buzzing. In seven outings (two starts), he posted a 0.56 ERA, allowing only eight hits and one run over 16 innings with seven walks and 19 strikeouts.

It wasn't just the statistics—it was how he threw the ball. His fastball registered in the 97-98 mph range regularly, and his sharp-breaking slider was so filthy that both righties and lefties had trouble making contact.

"The Arizona Fall League helped me redefine my pitches and my mechanics," he said. "It gave me that one last burst after the season."

"Halfway through the season, I changed where I throw on the mound. I moved to the first-base side a little bit. It made my slider sharper, gave me a better angle going into the

back foot of the righties. And it made it easier to throw back-door (breaking balls). It also gave me better command of my fastball, being able to throw to both sides of the plate."

As a reward for that showing, Hader—who doesn't have to be protected on the 40-man roster yet—was invited to the Brewers' major league spring camp. It's an honor afforded few players at that early stage of their career, and Hader isn't taking it lightly.

"Maybe I can impress them enough to break with the team out of camp. You never know," he said. "My expectations are to do what I can do and let everything unfold from there."

MICROBREWS

■ The Brewers acquired 19-year-old shortstop **Isan Diaz** from the Diamondbacks in the trade that sent **Jean Segura** and **Tyler Wagner** to Arizona.

■ The Brewers designated outfielder **Shane Peterson** for assignment after they acquired **Rymer Liriano** from the Padres but kept Peterson when he cleared waivers.



Josh Hader

MINE JAMES

CHICAGO | Cubs

BY JOHN MANUEL

Beefing Up Bullpen

CHICAGO The Cubs' bullpen was a significant strength in 2015, when the team finished third in the National League in ERA.

To repeat that performance, the front office has added more pieces for manager **Joe Maddon** to choose from, more options for the back of the bullpen.

That led to offseason acquisitions such as righthander **Spencer Patton**, acquired in November from the Rangers for shortstop Frandy de la Rosa. Patton was a Triple-A all-star in 2015, going 2-0, 1.67 with 11 saves in 26 games for Triple-A Round Rock, but struggled in 27 outings for Texas, with a 9.00 ERA. He's a sinker-slider pitcher who pitches in the low 90s with a low-80s slide, and at 28, he's fairly established as a potential ground ball guy.

A less established piece, also added to the 40-man roster this offseason, was righthander **Andury Acevedo**, signed to a major league deal as a minor league free agent on Nov. 18.

Acevedo originally signed as a position player with the Pirates in 2007. It's hard to believe now that Acevedo is listed at 6-foot-4, 235 pounds, but he signed as an infielder, even playing 15 games at shortstop in 2008 in the Rookie-level Gulf Coast League. The Pirates released Acevedo after the 2010 season, but he reinvented himself as a pitcher and earned a contract with the Yankees, who signed him in February 2012.

Acevedo has moved quickly, reaching Triple-A with the Yankees in 2015 after starting the year with high Class A Tampa. He was a Florida State League all-star and hit 98 mph when Cubs scouts saw him, usually sitting 95-97 with life down in the zone.

He's never thrown more than 60 innings in a full pro season, so Acevedo likely would be stretched to be a key late-inning piece in Chicago in 2016. But he has the arm to earn innings in Chicago this season.

CUBBYHOLE

■ Righthander **Jon Pettibone** signed a minor league deal and got an invitation to big league spring training. Pettibone, 25, twice ranked as the Phillies' No. 4 prospect and went 5-4, 4.04 in 2013 in Philadelphia. Two shoulder surgeries later, he missed the entire 2015 season and became a free agent in November.

■ The Cubs signed **Tommy Nance** out of the independent Frontier League. The 6-foot-4 righthander pitched collegiately at Long Beach State and Santa Clara, then struck out 40 in 38 innings of relief for Windy City last year.

CINCINNATI | Reds

BY C. TRENT ROSECRANS

Reds Form Pitching Caucus

CINCINNATI Fifteen of the Reds' pitchers, some prospects, some who got their first taste of the big leagues in 2015, met at the team's spring training home in Goodyear, Ariz., in mid-January for what manager **Bryan Price** called a "pitching summit."

The Reds are in a rebuilding phase and rebuilding with pitching, so Price, major league pitching coach **Mark Riggins**, bullpen coach **Mack Jenkins** and Triple-A pitching coach **Ted Power** hosted some of the team's top prospects. The lone veteran on the Reds' staff, **Homer Bailey**, was also there.

The Reds have loaded up on pitching prospects over the last couple of years, so there had to be limitations to keep the group to just 15. The group was limited to pitchers who reached at least the Double-A level in 2015 and could be part of the team's 2016 big league squad.

In all, the Reds had 110 games started by rookies. Seven of those are back this season and all seven—**Anthony DeSclafani**, **Raisel Iglesias**, **Michael Lorenzen**, **John Lamb**, **Brandon Finnegan**, **Jon Moscot** and **Keyvius Sampson**—were in Goodyear. They were joined by lefthander **Cody Reed**, **Rookie Davis**, **Stephen Johnson**, **Matt Magill**, **Robert Stephenson**, **Zack Weiss**, **Sal Romano** and Rule 5 pick **Chris O'Grady**.

"You look at the bunch and you say, that's a lot of talent," Price said. "To me, it's the next generation of young pitchers. I have to go back to when I first got the job in 2010 to feel this good with what we have in the system."

Nobody threw off the mound, and mostly the pitchers did what they were already doing in their training program for spring training.

"More than anything, it was an intensive period of time to focus on how we attain success as a group and how we grow faster, how we mature faster, because we're so young," Price said. "How do we create the expectation to be successful even though we're young and inexperienced as a staff? And how to unify our group and it's paramount that we look at this as a collective effort, not an individual one."

RED HOTS

■ Lamb had back surgery and might not be ready for spring training, but the team expects him for the regular season.

■ Outfielder **Scott Schebler** will be one of several players, along with **Yorman Rodriguez** and **Adam Duvall** to compete for the left-field job, which could also be a platoon.

PITTSBURGH | Pirates

BY JOHN PERROTTI

40-Man Spot A Gift

PITTSBURGH Shortstop **Gift Ngoepe** has long been a great human interest story in his journey from being raised by his mother in the clubhouse of a South African semipro team to signing with the Pirates in 2008.

However, the 26-year-old would like the next wave of media attention to be generated by becoming the first African to reach the major leagues.

Ngoepe is finally on the doorstep. The Pirates placed him on the 40-man roster in November.

He will have a chance to win a bench job in spring training. It is not completely out of the question that he could be the opening day second baseman as **Josh Harrison** might be needed to fill in at third base if **Jung Ho Kang** isn't completely recovered from the broken leg and torn knee ligaments he suffered last September.

"I see an opportunity for me to break camp with the squad," Ngoepe said.

Defense and speed have always been Ngoepe's best tools, but he has started to show improvement as a hitter in recent seasons. He also abandoned switch-hitting last year to bat exclusively from right side.

Ngoepe posted a combined .257/.333/.352 line in 91 games and 352 plate appearances with Double-A Altoona and Triple-A Indianapolis last season. The Pirates believe the numbers would have been better if he hadn't missed the last six weeks with a strained oblique muscle.

"I take my defense to heart," Ngoepe said. "Hitting-wise, you don't know what you're going to do. All you can do is hit a ball and whatever outcome you get is whatever happens from there. Defense, you can control a lot of stuff. I've worked on it since I was a kid."

PITTBURGERS

■ The Pirates signed Ngoepe's 18-year-old brother **Victor** after the shortstop impressed scouts while playing for South Africa's 18U team in last summer's World Cup and then again in December at the African Elite Camp in Cape Town.

■ Major League Baseball hired director of player personnel **Tyrone Brooks** as its senior director of the newly-created front office and field staff diversity pipeline program. As a result, the Pirates promoted director of baseball operations **Kevin Graves** to assistant GM, while assistant **Will Lawton** assumes Graves' old position and **Sean Kelly** moves to special assistant.

ST. LOUIS | Cardinals

BY DERRICK GOOLD

Pham Can See New Role

ST. LOUIS With the moves the Cardinals made this offseason—and one they didn't—late-bloomer **Tommy Pham** can clearly see the opportunity presented him this spring. It helps that he has new contacts.

Pham, 27, had his rise to the majors complicated by injuries and ailments, not the least of which was an eye condition discovered back when he was in Double-A that has, at times, limited his vision.

Back in 2009, with his average deteriorating as rapidly as his eyesight, Pham relented to an exam and learned he had keratoconus.

The narrowing of the cornea limited his vision without the help of contacts or glasses. He has tried to remain vigilant when it comes updating is prescription, but has been reluctant to do so during a season because of the adjustment. That made 2015 difficult.

"My vision was off, but I found ways to get the job done with them," Pham said. "I feel like once I have (contacts) in the season, I can't really make too much excuses with them."

Pham hit .327/.398/.503 in the minors in 2015 and vaulted to the majors for a .268/.347/.477 big league debut.

The Cardinals have cleared the way for him to see more at-bats more consistently in 2016.

The team was unable to re-sign **Jason Heyward** to play right field, allowing prospect **Stephen Piscotty** to see time there and not as a fourth outfielder, and the Cardinals traded veteran **Jon Jay** to San Diego.

Jay had served as the starting center fielder or fourth outfielder in recent years, and that is the role that Pham has been earmarked to handle.

He has his sights set this spring—and it only begins with the new hybrid contacts he will wear to see sharper from the start.

REDBIRD CHIRPS

■ Despite some concern about depth in the outfield, the Cardinals brought only two non-roster outfielders to spring training: **Carlos Peguero**, last with the Rangers and Red Sox, signed as a minor league free agent, and **Jeremy Hazelbaker**, who earned an invite to spring training with a .333/.403/.594 line after joining Triple-A Memphis in 2015.

■ As the Cardinals intend to reshape their medical staff for 2016, the club has hired a Duke University professor, **Dr. Robert Butler**, to oversee a "performance department" that will oversee and direct training and recovery approaches at all levels, including close work with the major league trainers.

Injuries not enough to slow Chapman

OAKLAND | Athletics

BY CASEY TEFERTILLER



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

OAKLAND First, his knee went bad. Then came a wrist injury. **Matt Chapman's** first full year as a pro was little more than a mixture of pains.

But somehow, between the ailments, Chapman, 22, managed to show the kind of potential the Athletics envisioned when they made him the 25th overall pick in the 2014 draft. He played impressive defense at third base and socked 23 home runs in only 80 games for high Class A Stockton.

"He began to display the power that we thought was there," farm director **Keith Lieppman** said. "He put together 23 home runs in three-quarters of a season. He was able

to show opposite field power and pull power. That was the exciting part of his year—to see that was there and he could play at the higher levels."

So after the year of agony and power, the 6-foot-2, 205-pound Chapman says he is completely healthy. He had been ticketed for the Arizona Fall League but had to drop out to have surgery on his left wrist.

"I had surgery in October, rehab in November, then I started getting back to lifting weights," Chapman said. "I started doing baseball stuff in January, hitting and fielding, and the wrist feels good."

Even with the injuries, Chapman never stopped working. With the aid of Stockton hitting coach **Brian McArn**, he rebuilt his swing from his college years at Cal State Fullerton.

"In college, I had a short, compact swing that didn't allow me to tap into my power," Chapman said. "I had to make a few small adjustments, nothing too crazy. I just kind of

pushed my hands back and tried to find the consistent spot to have my hands at the start of my swing. The smaller the movement you make, the more consistent you can be."

Tinkering with the swing did add to his strikeouts. He fanned 79 times, a total that Lieppman predicts will diminish as Chapman grows more comfortable with the adjustments he has made. He also drew 39 walks and had a .341 on-base with his .250 average.

Chapman will likely be assigned to Double-A Midland next year, where he will continue to develop the swing the A's believe will make him into a premium third baseman.

A'S ACORNS

■ A's top prospect **Franklin Barreto** will play short, second base and center field in 2016. A shortstop by trade, he played center in the Venezuelan Winter League.

■ Pitching coordinator **Gil Patterson** and mental skills instructor **Mark Strickland** were among the A's staffers working at the club's Dominican camp in late January.



Matt Chapman

BILL MITCHELL

HOUSTON | Astros

BY JOSE DE JESUS ORTIZ

Martes' Next Goal In Sight

HOUSTON Righthander **Francis Martes** sprinted up the minor league ladder last season, and now he's adding to his repertoire and hoping to jump to the big leagues in 2016.

In 2015, Martes cruised through low Class A Quad Cities before overpowering opposing hitters at high Class A Lancaster to earn a promotion to Double-A Corpus Christi months before he turned 20 in November.

Martes dominated mainly with a mid-90s fastball and wicked curveball combination. He also throws a changeup. Pitching coordinator **Doug White** asked his young righthander to start working on a cutter, so he began learning how to throw that pitch in January in his native Dominican Republic.

"It's a process, but everything is fine," Martes said of his new addition. "I have to try to get better, because every day you have to have a goal. Every year you have to make yourself better."

Martes, who struck out 98 and walked only 28 over a career-high 102 innings last year, was not allowed to play winter ball this year.

Nonetheless, he has been busy perfecting his craft with the help of new Astros Gulf Coast League pitching coach **Erick Abreu**.

"It'll be something that he can use hard against lefties as another pitch, basically," farm director **Allen Rowin** said of the cutter.

In addition to the cutter, Martes has focused on his direction to home plate this winter.

"I'm working on staying back in my delivery," he said.

The 6-foot-1, 225-pound Martes has drawn plenty of praise since the Astros acquired him, **Colin Moran**, **Jake Marisnick** and a 2015 compensatory draft pick from the Marlins on July 31, 2014, for **Jarred Cosart**, **Enrique Hernandez** and **Austin Wates**.

He was 8-3, 2.04 in 102 innings between Quad Cities, Lancaster and Corpus Christi last year. He was 4-1 with a 2.31 ERA in six games (five starts) at hitter-friendly Lancaster to earn a promotion to Corpus Christi.

SPACE SHOTS

■ Righthander **Joe Musgrove**, the organization's 2015 minor league pitcher of the year, reported to Osceola County Stadium on Feb. 1 to prepare for his first big league camp.

■ Lefthander **Michael Freeman**, catchers **Jamie Ritchie** and **Garrett Stubbs** and outfielder **Teoscar Hernandez** were among the players invited to the Astros' minor league micro minicamp in February in Kissimmee, Fla.

LOS ANGELES | Angels

BY MIKE DIGIOVANNA

Hinshaw's Hope

ANAHEIM As good a defensive center fielder as **Chad Hinshaw** has become in three years in the Angels' system, he has no future there with the club that drafted him in the 15th round out of Illinois State in 2013.

The Angels are set in center, at least through 2020, with **Mike Trout**, who's a full year younger than Hinshaw, 25. But there could be a crack in the front door of the Angels lineup, and it may provide Hinshaw's only hope at becoming a big league regular.

Probable 2016 leadoff man **Yunel Escobar** is only signed through this season with an option for 2017.

Assuming Hinshaw, who can play both corner spots, advances to Triple-A Salt Lake, a strong season there could position him for a reserve outfield spot or possibly the starting left-field job by 2017 or 2018.

"From his ability to get on base to his base-stealing ability, he's definitely a guy who can hit at top of the order," said **Mike LaCassa**, the team's director of minor league operations. "He's always had a high walk rate and an OBP over .300. He's a very patient hitter who understands the value of getting on base."

He slashed .258/.412/.281 with nine stolen bases in 10 attempts at Rookie-level Orem in 2013. He split 2014 between low Class A Burlington and high Class A Inland Empire, slashing .270/.365/.477 with 16 homers and 41 stolen bases in 56 attempts in 124 games.

A torn-thumb ligament sidelined the 6-foot-1, 205-pound Hinshaw for 10 weeks and sapped his power in 2015, when he slashed .289/.391/.365 in 71 games at Double-A Arkansas. But he had a solid 12-game Arizona Fall League stint, slashing .349/.397/.508.

Hinshaw has also earned high marks for his makeup.

"He gives it his all every day, and you can see it in the way he plays center field and runs the bases," LaCassa said. "He plays hard, he takes the extra base on the basepaths and takes bases away from you in the field."

ANGEL FOOD

■ The Angels acquired corner infielder **Jefry Marte**, who hit four homers in 80 at-big-league at-bats last season, from the Tigers for second baseman **Kody Eaves**, who has not played higher than the Class A level in four seasons.

■ Righthander **Yunesky Maya** and lefthander **Jose Molina** and shortstop **Anthony Phillips** signed minor league deals with the Angels.

SEATTLE | Mariners

BY RYAN DIVISH

Latest Import

SEATTLE An unexpected candidate for the Mariners' platoon partner with **Adam Lind** at first base has been added to the competition.

With no ideal candidate to fill that role, Seattle signed slugging Korean first baseman **Dae-Ho Lee** to a minor league contract with an invite to big league spring training. He'll compete with **Jesús Montero**, **Gaby Sanchez** and **Stefen Romero** for the spot.

"Dae-Ho gives us another potential right-handed power bat in the first base competition," general manager **Jerry Dipoto** said. "He has performed at a very high level of production in both Korea and Japan and we are excited to see how that translates to our team."

The Mariners scouted Lee heavily at the Premier 12 in November in Tokyo with director of international scouting **Tim Kissner** and vice president of player personnel **Tom Allison** watching him in person.

Lee, who turns 34 in June, put up monster numbers last season for Fukuoka in Japan's Pacific League. He hit .282 with a .892 OPS, 20 doubles, 31 homers and 98 RBIs in 141 games. He was also named the MVP of the Japan Series, leading Fukuoka to a win.

Before his move to Japan, Lee dominated the Korean Baseball Organization for 11 seasons. He was the MVP in 2010, a three-time batting champion, a two-time home run champ and a two-time RBI leader.

Lee is a striking presence, standing 6-foot-4 and appearing to weigh more than his listed weight of 280 pounds. But in preparation to sign with a Major League team, Lee has been working out the past few months at the Mariners' complex in Peoria, Ariz. According to sources, he has shaved off a serious amount of weight to prepare for the transition. Reports varied between 25-40 pounds.

The Mariners won't rush Lee if he doesn't adjust to playing in the U.S. immediately and are comfortable starting him with Triple-A Tacoma.

MARINADE

■ Shortstop prospect **Drew Jackson** spent his offseason at Stanford preparing for his first full season but also completing the 17 credits needed to complete his degree—a bachelor's of arts in Science, Technology and Society.

■ The Mariners signed Cuban infielder **Dainer Moreira** to a minor league contract. Moreira, 32, defected a year ago at the Caribbean World Series. The Mariners view Moreira as a utility player with exceptional speed.

TEXAS | Rangers

BY JEFF WILSON

Change Of Scenery

ARLINGTON Righthander **Myles Jaye** spent the past two seasons at Double-A Birmingham in a thin White Sox system.

He pitched well enough in 2015 to earn his first taste of Triple-A—he went 12-9, 3.29 and allowed opponents to hit .244—yet he needed a change in organizations to get that bump.

Jaye appears headed to Triple-A Round Rock to open 2016, assuming he doesn't shock the world and make the Rangers' starting rotation after being handed a non-roster invite to big league camp.

A return to Double-A, at Frisco, would likely be only temporary.

The Rangers needed Jaye after shipping three pitching prospects to Philadelphia last season in the July 31 trade for **Cole Hamels**. They also wanted him, trading for him on the final day of the Winter Meetings and immediately putting him into the ranks of their starting pitching depth if and when the Rangers need help this season.

"I think I'm in a little bit better spot here," said Jaye, 24. "But nothing changes. You still have to go to the ballpark every day and work your tail off."

The 6-foot-3, 170-pound Jaye is at his best when his sinker is sinking and he's throwing his changeup as much as 20 times a game. He allowed just eight homers in 148 innings and had a 1.13 groundout-to-air out ratio, and he also lowered his WHIP at Double-A from 1.51 in 2014 to 1.23.

He focuses on putting hitters away in three pitches or less, keeping the ball around the plate and mixing in a curveball and a slider that he throws a little harder than in the past.

That combination should play well at Triple-A, which Jaye is expected to reach with his new organization, his third. He was originally drafted by the Blue Jays in 2010.

"It's definitely a fresh start," said Jaye, who participated in the Rangers' annual winter mini-camp late month. "It's a good position. It feels like family already. It feels like home."

RANGERS ROUNDUP

■ **Rafic Saab** was promoted to director of international scouting Jan. 27, replacing **Gil Kim** after he departed for the Toronto organization.

■ Ownership partners **Ray Davis** and **Neil Leibman** joined the Rangers' front office during their annual trip to the Dominican Republic with the goal of securing land for a new Latin American complex.

Johnson ready to prove himself in L.A.

LOS ANGELES | Dodgers

BY BILL PLUNKETT



For statistics, organization reports, prospect lists and recent drafts, check out: baseballamerica.com/t/organization-reports/

LOS ANGELES Micah Johnson has a simple philosophy.

"It's beyond my paygrade to be a GM yet," the 25-year-old second baseman said in January. "I've still got a couple years of playing before I worry about the GM moves. So I don't think about it. I just play."

That's a good thing—because a lot has seemed out of Johnson's control lately.

The former Indiana Hoosier, who turned 25 in December, went to camp with the White Sox last spring and won the job as their primary second baseman, making his major league debut as the starter there on Opening Day.

By mid-May, Johnson was hitting .270 with a .333 on-base percentage, but his defense was deemed too unreliable and he was sent back to Triple-A. He returned to the White Sox as a September callup. But by then his left knee was bothering him and he played in just nine games. He had arthroscopic surgery to remove scar tissue in October.

"I don't know. It just didn't pan out," Johnson said of his season with the White Sox. "I have no regrets about my time there. . . I'd take .270 every year if I could hit that .270 in the big leagues."

The Dodgers would probably be happy with that. They acquired Johnson as part of a three-team swap in December that landed third baseman **Todd Frazier** in Chicago and brought three prospects (Johnson, outfielder **Trayce Thompson** and righthander **Frankie Montas**) to the Dodgers.

Dodgers president of baseball operations **Andrew Friedman** called Johnson "a high-

end athlete" and "plus-plus runner." There seemed to be an opening for Johnson to win at least a share of the second base job.

Then the Dodgers re-signed veterans **Chase Utley** and **Howie Kendrick**. Johnson will likely find himself back in Triple-A again in 2016, waiting for an opening.

"I have to go perform, and that's what I want to do," Johnson said. "Whatever opportunities I get—I know Howie and Chase, they're going to get their reps. When I get mine, I don't have the luxury of sitting around."

L.A. CONFIDENTIAL

■ Former Dodgers farmhand **Luis Mateo** was suspended 50 games for testing positive for amphetamines. Mateo, 25, split time between Double-A and Triple-A in 2015.

■ The Dodgers re-signed righthander **Brandon Beachy** then outrighted him to their Triple-A roster. Beachy, 29, made it back from a second Tommy John surgery to make two starts for the Dodgers last July, but he was ineffective and spent most of the season in the minors.



Micah Johnson

MINE JULIA

ARIZONA | Diamondbacks

BY JACK MAGRUDER

Back And Better Than Ever

PHOENIX Righthander **Evan Marshall** has been back on a mound for two weeks now, and it feels just like old times. Only more so.

"Everything is great," Marshall said. "I'm in the best shape I've ever been in. I'm stronger than I've ever been. It's part of the whole rehab process."

Marshall missed the final two months of the 2015 season after sustaining a fractured skull when he was hit on the right side of his head by a line drive while pitching for Triple-A Reno at El Paso on Aug. 4. He had surgery to address swelling and bleeding on the brain that night.

His recovery process has gone so well that on the impact test mandated by major league baseball's concussion protocol, Marshall said doctors told him he scored even higher than on his 2011 baseline score.

"Now all that's left to do is make the team," said the 6-foot-2, 225 pound Marshall, a valuable member of the 2014 bullpen before splitting 2015 between the D-backs and Reno.

"Compared to what I've been through, this is just fun."

At pitching coach **Mike Butcher's** suggestion, he adjusted his follow-through in an attempt to keep the ball lower in the zone. It was not an overhaul, just a small tweak, and the early returns looked good.

"I see the pitches going to the same places with movement every time," Marshall said. "It's definitely a boost I needed. Fastball command. When I hold the ball, I'm holding the follow through for a second. It's such a simple thing, but it has really helped."

Marshall, 25, who was 4-4, 2.74 in 57 appearances with the D-backs in 2014, will wear a protective foam pad inside his cap for the rest of his career. He tried the type of cap worn by **Alex Torres**, in which the foam is fastened to the cap with a velcro piece at the back, but he found it a bit cumbersome.

"It's a small sacrifice to make," he said.

SNAKE BITES

■ **Luis Urueta** and **Wellington Cepeda** were named to the newly created positions of short-season field coordinator and short-season pitching coordinator, respectively.

■ The Drabeks will be reunited in spring training after righthander **Kyle Drabek** signed a minor league contract with a spring training invite. Former NL Cy Young winner **Doug Drabek** has been a pitching coach in the system for the last six seasons.

COLORADO | Rockies

BY JACK ETKIN

High Marks For Marquez

DENVER Summing up the acquisition of lefthanded reliever **Jake McGee**, general manager **Jeff Bridich** said, "There's an intent here to continue to bombard this organization with impact pitching. And this is just simply another example of that."

Bridich wasn't referring solely to McGee. The trade that sent outfielder **Corey Dickerson** and third baseman **Kevin Padlo** to the Rays also netted righthander **German Marquez**, adding another pitching prospect to Colorado's system.

Marquez, who turns 22 on Feb. 22, joins that prospect mix. He has held his own while being one of the youngest players at each level since first playing in the U.S. in 2013 in the Rookie-level Appalachian League.

"Those are all good signs," Bridich said. "There are signs of maturity there. It's another really good arm and hopefully a really good pitcher that we can hope to finish off. It looks like Tampa has done a nice job of developing him from when they signed him."

The 6-foot-1, 184-pound Marquez went 7-13, 3.56 in 139 innings last year for High Class A Charlotte, averaging 1.9 walks and 6.7 strikeouts per nine innings. He's shown the ability to work the lower half of the strike zone, allowing just 13 homers in 290 pro innings.

"This is a low to mid-90s power attack," Bridich said. "He can really spin a curveball. His changeup is developing and still needs to develop. We dug and did our due diligence on the human being—the character, the makeup. It all checked out. The things we've heard, it's all positive."

The trade caps a momentous offseason for Marquez, who had been placed on the Rays' 40-man roster for the first time.

"Obviously, the Rays thought enough of him to protect him," Bridich said. "And we certainly would've as well if he had been in our organization prior to the trade. We just think there's a lot of upside there with the kid."

ROCKY ROADS

■ **Anthony Sanders** was named development supervisor at high Class A Modesto. He's spent nine seasons in the organization, the past three managing Rookie-level Grand Junction.

■ After serving as short-season Boise's hitting coach in his first season in the organization, **Andy Gonzalez** will manage the team in 2016.

SAN DIEGO | Padres

BY TOM KRASOVIC

Padres Turn Page On Liriano

SAN DIEGO At age 24, outfielder **Rymer Liriano** still has time to make his mark in the big leagues.

It just won't be with the Padres.

Liriano, who in 2012-13 was one of the franchise's top prospects, went to the Milwaukee Brewers on Jan. 28 in a trade for Double-A pitcher **Trevor Seidenberger**.

General Manager **A.J. Preller** inherited and traded Liriano, who, because of his raw power, powerful build, quick feet and strong throwing arm, drew comparisons to former Dodgers standout **Raul Mondesi** early in his minor league career.

Preller had acquired several other right-handed corner outfielders, including **Matt Kemp** and Rule 5 draftee **Jabari Blash**, in addition to holding on to prospect **Hunter Renfro**, who will compete for a major league job in spring training.

Liriano is a career .277/.350/.435 hitter in the minor leagues.

Recovering from Tommy John surgery, he missed 2013 but made his major league debut in August 2014. In his seventh career at-bat, he wheeled on an inside fastball and drove a 427-foot home run into the Western Metal Supply Co. building at Petco Park.

His vulnerabilities to breaking balls would surface, too. In 38 games and 109 at-bats with the Padres, he batted .220/.289/.266 with only the one home run. He was the only outfielder on the 40-man roster who didn't get a September callup last year.

Liriano posted high strikeout rates in several seasons. He has one strikeout per 3.7 at-bats in his minor league career.

After he was designated for assignment, the trade brought Seidenberger, 23.

The lefthanded reliever has a career ERA of 4.38 with 8.5 strikeouts per nine innings and 3.4 walks per nine. A 12th-round pick in 2013 out of Texas Christian, Seidenberger reached high Class A in 2015, going 4-2, 3.06 in 35 innings.

FATHER FIGURES

■ Former Padres manager **Bruce Bochy** is among the candidates for the California League Hall of Fame this year. Bochy managed High Desert to the 1991 Cal League title.

■ Rule 5 draftee **Luis Perdomo**, a 22-year-old taken out of the Cardinals system, will compete in spring training for a job in either the bullpen or the rotation. He has yet to pitch above Class A.

SAN FRANCISCO | Giants

BY ANDY BAGGARLY

Winning Experience

SAN FRANCISCO One of **Buster Posey's** greatest honors from his college days was winning the Johnny Bench Award as the nation's top catcher.

He won't be the only catcher in Giants camp to have been a finalist for the award.

The organization isn't wasting any time exposing **Matt Winn** to big league life. Just eight months after being drafted in the 14th round out of Virginia Military Institute, Winn received an invitation to major league spring training. He'll catch bullpens alongside Posey, **Andrew Susac** and others.

Not a bad spot for a 23-year-old kid who has played a grand total of 36 games in his professional career.

Winn hit just .216/.277/.328 in those games split between the Giants' Rookie-level affiliate in the Arizona League and low Class A Augusta.

But in terms of life experience, Winn might have even Posey beat. Unlike Posey, who learned to catch in his sophomore year at Florida State, the 6-foot-1, 220-pound Winn has been strapping on shinguards since he was 10 years old. He starred at VMI and is the program's all-time leader in runners picked off (25) and fielding percentage (.989). Attempted base stealers had just a 61.1 percent success rate against him.

Winn also starred with the bat while starting all 50 games for the Keydets as a senior, hitting .304 with a club-best 14 home runs while playing close to his home in Richmond.

As he climbs the ladder, he figures to play in front of friends and family again since the Giants' Double-A affiliate is right in town.

Winn was a finalist but didn't win the Bench Award. Southern California's **Garrett Stubbs** took the honor. But while Stubbs will have a locker in minor league camp with the Astros, Winn will have the chance to catch **Madison Bumgarner**, **Johnny Cueto**, **Jake Peavy** and **Matt Cain**.

Not a bad consolation prize.

GIANTICS

■ Righthander **Dylan Brooks** was suspended 50 games after an undisclosed violation of the Minor League Drug Prevention and Treatment Program. Brooks, a 30th-round selection in 2013, was previously suspended in January 2015, when he had a second positive test for a drug of abuse.

■ Shortstop **Christian Arroyo**, born in 1995, will be the youngest player in the Giants' major league camp this spring.

2016 PRESEASON HIGH SCHOOL ALL- AMERICA TEAM

Baseball America's Preseason All-America Team, voted on by scouting directors for major league organizations, aims to identify the nation's most talented prep players. In today's game, scouts have many more looks at the top high schoolers, thanks to the explosion of travel baseball and the showcase circuit, as well as the success of USA Baseball's 18U national team and other development programs for high school players.

Last year's preseason team proved the efficacy of the voting process. Seven of the eight first-team position players became first-round or competitive balance round picks; only catcher Chris Betts, who went 52nd overall, went lower. Four of the five first-team pitchers were first-rounders as well.

The members of the 2016 Preseason High School All-America team hope to follow in their predecessors' footsteps, and scouts hope so too. They see 2016 as a deep high school class, as one director put it, "which makes it a scouts' draft. It's an exciting opportunity for us as scouts, and it challenges your area scouts to go out and fight for the guys they love, to find the right guys. The high school pitching depth is really good . . . I think the overall consensus is, guys are fairly interchangeable in that Top 50 or so."



ALYSON BOYER RODE

Cooper Johnson
Carmel Catholic HS, Mundelein, Ill.

Mature physically and off the field as well, Johnson is a showcase vet. His glove is ahead of his bat at this stage. Johnson has soft hands, plus receiving skills and a potentially elite throwing arm. His pitch recognition and contact skills lag behind, but he has some bat speed that gives him offensive potential. The Mississippi commit stands out in a catcher class heavy on bat-first players.



CLIFF WELCH

Alex Kirilloff
Plum HS, New Kensington, Pa.

The first round has produced successful prep first basemen in recent years, from Adrian Gonzalez (2000) to Prince Fielder and James Loney (both 2002) to Eric Hosmer (2008). A Liberty commit, Kirilloff isn't the typical first baseman in that he's an above-average runner with a plus arm. He generates tremendous bat speed and raw power despite a swing that features a barred arm that adds some length to his path.



MIKE JAMES

Will Benson
The Westminster Schools, Atlanta

With his Atlanta address, lefthanded swing and tall, lean frame, Benson gets physical comparisons to Jason Heyward. That does the Duke commit no favors, as Benson has some holes in his swing that he must work to close. He also has bat speed to rival any hitter in the class, giving him excellent raw power. He's at least an average runner who fits the right field profile, though his stock is as volatile as any first-team hitter.



BILL MITCHELL

Mickey Moniak
La Costa Canyon HS, Carlsbad, Calif.

Moniak, a UCLA signee, doesn't have the explosiveness of fellow outfielders Benson and Blake Rutherford, but he's a good athlete who can hit and does many things well. His instincts and motor show up the most in center field, where he's a fine defender whose plus speed plays. Moniak has a solid lefthanded swing with natural timing and gap power, and he could develop into a true plus hitter.



BILL MITCHELL

Blake Rutherford
Chaminade College Prep, Canoga, Calif.

The top hitter in the high school class, Rutherford was the captain of USA Baseball's 18U gold-medal winning team with a team-best 14 RBIs. Most scouts grade Rutherford as a future plus hitter who could wind up with plus power as well. He's an above-average runner with a chance to stick in center field as well. Rutherford's long track record and high floor could make the UCLA signee the top prep bat drafted.



CLIFF WELCH

Austin Bergner
Windermere (Fla.) HS

Signed to North Carolina, Bergner was hitting 90 mph with his fastball before he got to high school. He now pitches in the low-to-mid 90s, having touched 96. He throws strikes with his changeup and curveball, with the change grading ahead of the breaking ball. His long track record helps but could work against him if he doesn't continue to show scouts improvement.



ALYSON BOYER RODE

Kevin Gowdy
Santa Barbara (Calif.) HS

Gowdy's clean arm action makes it easier for him to repeat his release point, making him one of the class' best strike-throwers. He has a polished delivery and knack for pitching, pounding the zone with a 90-93 mph fastball and potentially plus breaking ball with 10-to-4 shape and low-80s power. A UCLA recruit, Gowdy could move up draft boards with his ability to locate his stuff and his feel for changing speeds.



BILL MITCHELL

Jason Groome
Barnegat (N.J.) HS

Groome, a Vanderbilt signee, is the standard-bearer for this year's prep class. He's young for the class but has present strength and impressive physicality at 6-foot-4, 224 pounds. Makeup concerns and injury seem to be the only potential obstacles to Groome being the first prep player drafted. "It's a gifted body with an easy delivery, great fastball and tremendous curveball that's the best one in the class."



Nolan Jones

Holy Ghost Prep, Langhorne, Pa.

One of two first-team All-Americans from the Keystone State, Jones plays high school shortstop but profiles better on a corner, likely third base, either as a pro or if he makes it to college at Virginia. A prep hockey player, Jones has plus raw power that ranks toward the top of the class, as his swing has leverage and he's added strength to his frame, gaining as much as 35 pounds in the last year. He has a plus arm as well.

CLIFF WELCH



Delvin Perez

International Baseball Academy, Ceiba, P.R.

The 2016 class has fewer shortstop options than 2015 in either the high school or college ranks, with Puerto Rican prep Perez the best prospect. While he could play with a bit less mustard and more body control, Perez has undeniable tools, with twitchy athleticism, easy plus arm strength and speed, and the range, actions and agility for shortstop. Scouts will be watching the progress of his bat closely.

MIKE JAMES



Josh Lowe

Pope HS, Marietta, Ga.

Lowe has as much upside as any position player in the draft, with a 6-foot-4, 190-pound frame and the athleticism to make third base work even at his size. The Florida State signee has the arm strength to pitch with easy mid-90s velocity, but his raw power potential wins the day for scouts. His feel for hitting seemed to improve the more quality arms he saw over the course of the summer showcase circuit.

CLIFF WELCH



Ian Anderson

Shenendohowa HS, Clifton Park, N.Y.

A Vanderbilt signee, Anderson has the body, live arm and Northern background that make scouts comfortable making lofty projections about the quality of his future stuff. His present pitches are plenty good now—his fastball sits in the low 90s presently, he's shown a feel for a plus changeup and has shown the ability to spin a curveball, which needs work but is making progress.

ALISON BOYER-RODE

Anderson checks all the boxes scouts look for in Northeast-area prospects

BY HUDSON BELINSKY

Ian Anderson fits into many of the standard "projection" categories that teams have used for years. Anderson is a 6-foot-3, rail-thin righthanded pitching prospect, with a clean delivery that he repeats well.

Anderson's fastball sits in the low 90s and has touched as high as 94. He complements it with a changeup that could become a plus pitch, as well as an improving breaking ball that shows late dive as it crosses through the strike zone. He's also from upstate New York, making him one of the most projectable pitchers in the 2016 draft class. Anderson's high upside, and his high draft stock, represent a turning point in Northeast baseball.

A lot of the language used to describe Anderson was applied to another right-hander from New York's capital region back in 2011. When Rockies prospect Jeff Hoffman graduated from Shaker High in Latham, N.Y., he was lanky and thin—perhaps even thinner than Anderson—and evaluators could project his body to add significant muscle.

"I had to get stronger. I knew if I didn't there would be complications. I was 6-foot-5 and 165 pounds," said Hoffman, now in the Rockies organization, "and I threw low 90s and that just doesn't work. Getting stronger was the most important thing I had to do."

While the rest of Hoffman's story remains unwritten, the rising action took place when he went to East Carolina. There, Hoffman teamed up with then-head coach Billy Godwin and pitching coach Dan Roszel. He quickly added some meat to his bones, and exploded into a first-round pick in 2014.

"The first time I saw him, (his fastball) was 88-90, which isn't going to blow away pro scouts," said Godwin, now a Yankees area scout. "You see more projectable guys up there because they typically haven't thrown a lot, and they haven't been seen a lot."

This was a part of East Carolina's recruiting strategy, trying to dig into the nooks and crannies of the Northeast for prospects that could have an immediate impact, but wouldn't be plucked away by power conference schools or major league teams.

Hoffman generated some pro interest

ALL-AMERICA TEAMS

FIRST TEAM

Name	School	Ht.	Wt.	Commitment
C Cooper Johnson	Carmel Catholic High, Mundelein, Ill.	6-0	200	Mississippi
1B Alex Kirilloff	Plum High, New Kensington, Pa.	6-2	195	Liberty
MIF Delvin Perez	International Baseball Academy, Ceiba, P.R.	6-2	165	Uncommitted
MIF Nolan Jones	Holy Ghost Prep, Langhorne, Pa.	6-4	216	Virginia
3B Josh Lowe	Pope High, Marietta, Ga.	6-4	190	Florida State
OF Will Benson	The Westminster Schools, Atlanta	6-5	225	Duke
OF Mickey Moniak	La Costa Canyon High, Carlsbad, Calif.	6-1	180	UCLA
OF Blake Rutherford	Chaminade College Prep, Canoga Park, Calif.	6-1	176	UCLA
P Jason Groome	Barnegat (N.J.) High	6-4	225	Vanderbilt
P Ian Anderson	Shenendohowa High, Clifton Park, N.Y.	6-3	180	Vanderbilt
P Kevin Gowdy	Santa Barbara (Calif.) High	6-2	171	UCLA
P Riley Pint	St. Thomas Aquinas High, Overland Park, Kan.	6-5	195	Louisiana State
P Austin Bergner	Windermere (Fla.) Prep	6-4	190	North Carolina

2ND TEAM

Name	School	Ht.	Wt.	Commitment
C Ben Rortvedt	Verona (Wisc.) High	5-9	185	Arkansas
1B Christian Jones	Federal Way (Wash.) High	6-1	212	Washington
MIF Carter Kieboom	Walton High, Marietta, Ga.	6-2	185	Clemson
MIF Nick Quintana	Arbor View High, Las Vegas	5-9	185	Arizona
3B Joe Rizzo	Oakton High, Vienna, Va.	5-11	215	South Carolina
OF Avery Tuck	Steele Canyon High, Spring Valley, Calif.	6-5	188	San Diego State
OF Taylor Trammell	Mount Paran Christian School, Kennesaw, Ga.	6-2	195	Georgia Tech
OF Trevyne Carter	Soddy Daisy (Tenn.) High	6-2	180	Tennessee
P Forrest Whitley	Alamo Heights High, San Antonio, Texas	6-6	253	Florida State
P Reggie Lawson	Victor Valley High, Victorville, Calif.	6-3	213	Arizona State
P Matt Manning	Sheldon High, Sacramento	6-5	194	Loyola Marymount
P Jesus Luzardo	Stoneman Douglas High, Pompano Beach, Fla.	6-1	209	Miami
P Braxton Garrett	Florence (Ala.) High	6-3	190	Vanderbilt

3RD TEAM

Name	School	Ht.	Wt.	Commitment
C Brad Debo	Orange High, Hillsborough, N.C.	6-0	221	South Carolina
1B Walker Robbins	George County High, Lucedale, Miss.	6-3	210	Mississippi State
MIF Gavin Lux	Indian Trail Academy, Kenosha, Wisc.	6-0	167	Arizona State
MIF Luis Curbelo	Cocoa (Fla.) High	6-3	187	Miami
3B Drew Mendoza	Lake Minneola High, Minneola, Fla.	6-4	195	Florida State
OF Akil Baddoo	Salem High, Conyers, Ga.	6-1	195	Kentucky
OF Thomas Jones	Laurens (S.C.) High	6-3	195	Vanderbilt
OF Austin Langworthy	Williston (Fla.) High	5-11	180	Florida
P Alex Speas	McEachern High, Powder Springs, Ga.	6-4	187	Auburn
P Cole Ragans	North Florida Christian School, Tallahassee, Fla.	6-4	190	Florida State
P Rian Haire	South Caldwell High, Hudson, N.C.	6-3	205	South Carolina
P Charles King	Coppell (Texas) High	6-5	201	Texas Christian
P Matt Cleveland	Windor (Conn.) High	6-3	189	Fla. Southwestern JC

when he was in high school, which peaked following his senior year, when he played in the Connie Mack World Series. Prior to that, Hoffman had limited exposure; he hadn't played in many of the major showcases that pro scouts attend.

The pro scouting process for Anderson, on the other hand, started following his sophomore year. Unlike Hoffman, Anderson has had plenty of exposure to high-level competition and the scouting community.

"It gave me a ton of confidence," Anderson said of the showcase circuit. "Northeast guys want to know they can play with anyone. Northeast guys have shown again and again that they can do it."

Anderson has focused exclusively on baseball since he got to high school. This winter, he's added about 10 pounds of mus-

cle, but he's still just scratching the surface of his potential.

"When you look at the Northeast player—look at the (Mike) Trouts and (George) Springers—you can see when they're amateurs, they might not be as polished as the Southeast or West Coast kids," one scouting director said. "Then they start getting into the schedule of playing every day, and the (inexperience) starts to wear off."

The hope is that as Anderson ages and matures, he will polish some of his rough edges. This spring, he wants to cut down on his walks and continue to add strength.

While no player will ever be like Trout, the idea of projection applies similarly to Anderson, and to a lesser extent Hoffman. Ian Anderson is going to be very good. It's a matter of when, not if.



Riley Pint

St. Thomas Aquinas HS, Overland Park, Kan.

A Louisiana State signee, Pint has his supporters to be the top prep pitcher picked because of his outstanding velocity; he's touched 98 mph with his fastball, though he sits in the 93-94 mph range. Pint's delivery features a head jerk and inconsistent release point. That leads to insufficient control and below-average command. Pint's raw stuff excites, and he could be an electric, impact reliever.

MIKE JAMES

Preseason High School Top 50

The staff of Baseball America, spearheaded by Hudson Belinsky, and the National High School Baseball Coaches Association compile our preseason Top 50 rankings, and will conduct in-season Top 25 polls every two weeks throughout the season.

1. HUNTINGTON BEACH (CALIF.) HIGH

After a slow start in 2015, Huntington Beach rebounded quickly and went 25-8, going on to win the CIF Southern Division championship with a team filled with talented underclassmen. In 2016, most of that squad is back. Pitchers Hagen Danner, Nicholas Pratto and Logan Poulsen, all strong prospects committed to Pacific-12 Conference schools, form a dynamic staff for the Oilers. Huntington Beach should be expected to win every time it takes the field this season, though its schedule is filled with skilled Southern California competition, and the Oilers will play in two very challenging tournaments in the National High School Invitational and the Boras Classic.

2. WALTON HIGH, MARIETTA, GA.

Walton is hungry after losing the 6-A Georgia state championship in 2015, and it returns quite a bit of talent from last year's squad, which went 30-7 in one of the most competitive regions in the country. The Raiders' top player is shortstop Carter Kieboom, a Clemson commit who could be a high draft pick. Some scouts believe Kieboom to be one of the best righthanded hitters in the 2016 class. In addition to strong, fundamentally sound defense, and power in the middle of the lineup, Walton also has a bona fide ace in Georgia commit Zac Kristofak. The Raiders face a challenging conference schedule and will also be tested at the National High School Invitational in March.

3. COPPELL (TEXAS) HIGH

The Cowboys arguably have the best pitching staff in the country, with 6-foot-5 righthander Charles King leading the way. King, a Texas Christian commit, teams up with seniors Ray Gaither and Hayden Kettler and junior John Kodros, to form a four-headed monster that could run the table in Texas's tough 6-A classification. King's fastball has reached 95 mph in the past, and his repertoire also includes a promising slider. Coppel returns 11 starters from last year's squad and will be hungry after a Region 1 quarterfinal loss ended its season in 2015.

4. HAMILTON HIGH, CHANDLER, ARIZ.

Hamilton has a powerful 1-2 punch in its rotation with righthanders Zane Strand and Logan Boyer. Strand has a loose arm and is committed to Arizona State, while Boyer is a talented catcher and pitcher and headed to San Diego State. Both can reach into the low 90s on the mound. The Huskies bring back eight starters from last year's team.

5. JSERRA CATHOLIC HIGH, SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, CALIF.

JSerra's storied baseball tradition continues in 2016. The



Hagen Danner has won from Little League to Team USA to Huntington Beach High

Lions should have no trouble putting runs on the board, with speedy junior Royce Lewis setting the table for seniors Chase Strumpf, Brady Shockey, Davis Wendzel and Jack Owen, who should also serve as the ace of the pitching staff. In 2015, the Lions went 27-5 and reached the CIF Southern Section quarterfinals. JSerra's schedule in 2016 includes Huntington

Rk.	School	2015 Record
11.	Pope HS, Marietta, Ga.	24-9
12.	Archbishop Moeller HS, Cincinnati	31-3
13.	Basic HS, Henderson, Nev.	27-6
14.	Prosper (Texas) HS	35-3
15.	Barbe HS, St. Charles, La.	34-10
16.	Plant HS, Tampa	16-8
17.	Madison HS, Vienna, Va.	24-5
18.	St. Francis HS, Mountain View, Calif.	29-5
19.	Bentonville (Ark.) HS	22-8
20.	Flanagan HS, Pembroke Pines, Fla.	20-6
21.	Parkview HS, Lilburn, Ga.	34-2
22.	Houston Westside HS	23-7
23.	Calallen HS, Corpus Christi, Texas	31-5
24.	Christian Brothers HS, St. Louis	32-7
25.	Rock Canyon HS, Littleton, Col.	23-4
26.	Heritage HS, Brentwood, Calif.	20-5
27.	Malvern (Pa.) Prep	31-7
28.	Saint Xavier HS, Louisville, Ky.	29-10
29.	St. Thomas Aquinas HS, Overland Park, Kan.	19-3
30.	Farragut HS, Knoxville, Tenn.	20-6

Beach, Orange Lutheran and the loaded field at the Boras Classic's southern invitational.

6. NORTH BROWARD PREP, POMPANO BEACH, FLA.

North Broward has 10 seniors bound for college baseball, with Greg Veliz, a righthanded pitcher and infielder, leading the group. On the mound, his fastball can bump 98 and he has shown the ability to spin a quality breaking ball. In the rotation, Veliz will team up with Evan McKendry and Anthony Masiello, giving the Eagles a potentially dangerous rotation. All three pitchers are committed to Miami and could have an immediate impact if and when they make it to campus. The Eagles will be tested in late March, as they'll play in the National High School Invitational.

7. DE LA SALLE HIGH, CONCORD, CALIF.

Despite losing ace Justin Hooper to UCLA, the Spartans return five pitchers who are committed to play Division I baseball: Nick Sparks (St. Mary's), Connor Redmond (Cal Poly), Conner Roberts (UC Santa Barbara), Jordan Criss (Columbia) and junior Cullen Kafka (Oregon). Armani Smith (UC Santa Barbara) is the team's top returning hitter. The Spartans, who went 19-9 and made it to California's North Coast finals in 2015, face early tests against St. Francis and Elk Grove, and will quickly show people what they're made of in 2016.

8. OXFORD (MISS.) HIGH

After a brilliant 2015 season in which they won the Mississippi 5-A state title, the Chargers are poised for another run in 2016. Oxford has two Under Armour All-Americans in shortstop Grae Kessinger and transfer catcher Thomas Dillard. Kessinger's defense receives rave reviews, and Dillard is a sound receiver, as well as a switch-hitter with promising raw power. The Chargers rotation will be anchored by returning

Rk.	School	2015 Record
31.	Basha HS, Chandler, Ariz.	17-11
32.	Rancho Bernardo HS, San Diego	26-7
33.	Loganville (Ga.) HS	25-8
34.	Archbishop McCarthy HS, Southwest Ranches, Fla.	27-5
35.	Jefferson HS, Shenandoah Junction, W. Va.	37-2
36.	Timberline HS, Boise, Idaho	26-4
37.	Elk Grove (Calif.) HS	24-10
38.	Arrowhead HS, Hartland, Wisc.	26-2
39.	Omaha Westside HS	33-6
40.	Buchanan HS, Clovis, Calif.	29-7
41.	Venice (Fla.) HS	29-3
42.	George Washington HS, Bronx, N.Y.	19-1
43.	DeSoto Central HS, Southaven, Miss.	28-9
44.	Owasso (Okla.) HS	28-5
45.	Tottenville HS, Staten Island, N.Y.	20-4
46.	St. Thomas More HS, Lafayette, La.	30-9
47.	Francis Howell High, St. Charles, Mo.	23-13
48.	La Costa Canyon HS, Carlsbad, Calif.	26-7
49.	Cullman (Ala.) HS	44-10
50.	Christian Brothers Academy, Lincroft, N.J.	25-6



One of the nation's top bats, Carter Kieboom leads the offense for Marietta's Walton High

aces Jason Barber and Houston Roth, both of whom are committed to play at Mississippi. Oxford went 36-1 in 2015 and should dominate Mississippi again this season.

9. ORANGE (CALIF.) LUTHERAN HIGH

Orange Lutheran's storied baseball tradition continues on in 2016, and the Lancers bring back a talented group from 2015, with several high profile underclassmen. Juniors Garrett Mitchell and Tristan Hanoian, committed to UCLA and TCU respectively, will set the tone for the offense. Mitchell is a lefthanded-hitting outfielder with a line drive stroke, and he's one of the top prospects in the 2017 class. Seniors Cole Spear (UC Irvine), Chris Burica (Creighton) and Luke Mattson (Nevada) should all play a key role for the pitching staff. Freshman catcher Gabe Briones is no normal freshman, having won a gold medal with USA Baseball's 15U national team last summer. The Lancers face a challenging schedule featuring Huntington Beach, Puyallup (Wash.) High, JSerra Catholic and the loaded field at the Boras Classic.

10. CHRISTIAN BROTHERS HIGH, MEMPHIS

After going 36-9 and winning the Division 2 Class AA Tennessee state championship in 2015, the Purple Wave look to stay strong in 2016. Christian Brothers gets a boost in transfer righthander Weston Bizzle, a Vanderbilt commit whose fastball can reach into the low 90s. Austin Peay commit Landon Kelly, a versatile defender, will lead the way for the Purple Wave offensively.

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Baseball America

COLLEGE TOP 25 RANKINGS

2015 FINAL RANKINGS

RK.	SCHOOL	2015 RECORD	FINAL 2015 RANK	RK.	SCHOOL	2015 RECORD	FINAL 2015 RANK
1.	Florida	52-18	3	14.	Oregon	38-25	NR
2.	Louisville	47-18	10	15.	Michigan	39-25	NR
3.	Texas A&M	50-14	13	16.	Southern California	39-21	20
4.	Virginia	44-24	1	17.	Florida State	44-21	15
5.	Oregon State	39-19	NR	18.	Texas Christian	51-15	4
6.	Miami	50-17	6	19.	North Carolina State	36-23	NR
7.	Vanderbilt	51-21	2	20.	Mississippi State	24-30	NR
8.	California	36-21	22	21.	Oklahoma	34-27	NR
9.	Oklahoma State	38-20	19	22.	Cal State Fullerton	39-25	9
10.	UCLA	45-16	7	23.	Coastal Carolina	39-21	NR
11.	Louisiana State	54-12	5	24.	Mississippi	30-28	NR
12.	Houston	43-20	18	25.	Kentucky	30-25	NR
13.	Louisiana-Lafayette	42-23	16				

After CIF title, Oilers face high expectations

BY JOE HAAKENSON

HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIF.

Being ranked No. 1 in the nation is something most would expect from Huntington Beach High School's surfing team, rather than any other athletic team on the 100-plus-year-old campus that sits a few blocks from the Pacific Ocean.

But it is the school's baseball team that is riding a wave of success coming off a CIF-Southern Section Division 1 championship in 2015, to Baseball America's preseason No. 1 ranking for 2016.

It's been quite a long road to the top for the Oilers. Head coach Benji Medure pointed it out after the win over Newhall Hart in the championship game last year, noting his team had "done something that hadn't been done in 107 years."

And now the challenge the Oilers face is to match last year's CIF title, and do so under a bright spotlight. It's something they did not handle quite so well at the beginning of last season, when they were ranked No. 1 in Southern California by several publications.

Taking the field to start last season holding the No. 1 ranking, the Oilers lost five of their first seven games.

"Last year the biggest thing is we tried too hard to live up to the expectations," said Oilers senior shortstop Chad Minato, who has committed to Harvard. "Not so much that we were nervous necessarily, but we felt pressure to live up to where everyone had us. We got caught up too much in the rankings."

"We definitely learned our lesson and are doing our best to try to avoid what happened last year."

If Medure had his way, he'd prefer his players not talk—over even think—about the No. 1 ranking.

"It's a huge honor, I'm not going to downplay that," said Medure, 41, going into this 16th season as Huntington Beach's head coach. "But going through what we went through last year, experiencing the hardship and the pressure, I think we're going to be a little more battle-tested. I think we're going to be ready to handle it."

Medure can be relatively confident his team will be able to handle the pressure, as five of his players were members of the Little League World Series championship team in 2011.

Hagen Danner, Nick Pratto, Dylan Palmer, Trevor Windisch and Justin Cianca were members of Huntington Beach's Ocean View Little League team that beat Japan, 2-1, in the championship game in Williamsport, Pa.

In fact, Pratto had the game-winning hit, lining a single to center field with two outs and the bases loaded in the bottom of the sixth and final inning. Palmer had a key hit in the sixth inning as well, and Danner drove in the team's only other run with a home run earlier in the game.

"Ever since then, me and Hagen and the other guys too, we've been under a microscope," said Pratto, a 6-foot-2, 190-pound lefthander/first baseman who has committed to USC though still a junior. "It really helps you slow the game down and focus on what you need to focus on, and just play the game."



Physical veteran Logan Pouelsen gives Huntington Beach High experience and talent both as a third baseman and as a pitcher

ALYSON BOYER/RODE

Having a group of kids that played on national television at the age of 12 is not something Medure takes lightly. He knows it's a special situation.

"I think it's a huge advantage for them, handling the pressure, handling the press, handling interviews like this. Being on the big stage is probably old hat to them," Medure said. "I was telling somebody last year when Hagen was pitching (in USA Baseball's Tournament of Stars) in North Carolina, no offense to North Carolina, but he's been on a bigger stage and he was a lot younger."

"(Hagen) handles the moment well and they all do. They're very tough mentally and I think it has a lot to do with that experience. It's got to make you tough, going through that adversity and pressure as a 12-year-old."

Not Little League Anymore

Danner, a 6-foot-2, 195-pound righthander who has committed to UCLA, will team with Pratto to make a formidable 1-2 punch at the top of the Oilers' rotation. When Danner is not pitching, he can play any position other than shortstop and second base.

Last year as a sophomore, Danner led the team with seven victories, had a 1.15 ERA and 1.00 WHIP in 14 games (10 starts) covering 61 innings.

"I don't really care about the numbers," Danner said. "I just want to be as good on the mound as I can be, and win every game. Those are the goals for me."

Pratto transferred from nearby Mater Dei High School, a private school and athletic powerhouse. Like Danner, Pratto

insists he won't spend a lot of time looking at the stat sheet.

"I try not to get caught up in numbers as much as how I'm feeling about the effort I put forth," said Pratto, who joined Danner on USA Baseball's 18U team that won the gold at the 2015 World Championship. "Really just mechanically, how I'm hitting the ball. If it doesn't land, it doesn't land, but if I'm hitting it hard, then there's nothing else I can do. If I'm throwing the ball hard, there's nothing else I can do."

It's a mindset that Medure has emphasized with his players, getting them to focus on the team game.

"We are the anti-stat team," Medure said. "We keep stats just because we have to, but I don't look at them. I try not to let the boys look at them. Because things like the hustle numbers are never going to show in the stats. The good at-bats, where you may have been punched out but you made the pitcher throw 11 pitches. Those are the team at-bats, things that go overlooked that really make a team a success."

"And being an older team, a more mature team, we're so focused on the small parts of a game, breaking it down, trying to win little things throughout the game. These kids are really good at that."

Medure has plenty of options when making out his lineup for each game. Logan Pouelsen is a 6-foot-1, 230-pound senior righthander and third baseman. Lefthander/first baseman Cory Moore, a transfer from Yucaipa High, is a 6-foot-5, 220-pound junior. Mitch Kovary, Matt Geiger, Nate Madole and Kobe Anton also will get time on the mound.

Dominic Abbadesa, Landon Silver, Ben McConnell and J.J. Muratore will share time in the outfield, Windisch and Palmer will be in the infield mix while Danner and Anthony Martinez will have most of the catching duties.

It's an athletic team that Medure plans to maximize in the field and on the bases.

"We prioritize defense first," he said. "Defense and pitching, and then baserunning. I think baserunning is overlooked, first to third, reading balls in the dirt, taking a bag on an overthrow, being a good trail baserunner or letting a run score by recording the final out on the base paths. Just overall putting pressure on teams is our big thing because we are fast enough to make someone make a rushed throw. For us the key is pitching and defense, and running the heck out of the bases."

The Oilers waited 107 years for their first CIF title, and they don't plan on waiting that long for the next one.

"I was telling my wife, in almost everyone's eyes, anything less than a repeat this year will be a failure," Medure said. "And that's totally unfair. And it's not right. And so people can put that pressure on us all they want."

"Internally, we look at getting better every day, we look at sending kids to college, we look at playing as a team and just trying to win every day. I know that sounds cliché, but just trying to be the best we can every day and we'll take whatever the result is."

Freelance writer Joe Haakenson is based in Huntington Beach, Calif.



Junior colleges get early start in desert

BY BILL MITCHELL

PHOENIX

While college baseball fans eagerly awaited Feb. 19 for Division I opening day, junior college programs got a head start on Jan. 29.

The highlight of the first weekend in the Phoenix area was a three-game series between perennial powerhouse Central Arizona JC and Phoenix JC. Central Arizona swept the series, outscoring Phoenix, 35-9 over the course of the weekend.

Central Arizona outfielder/DH Mitchell Robinson joined the Vaqueros after starting his college career with one season at Florida International. He started his junior college career by going 5-for-13 with a home run and a stolen base in his first three games.

Robinson, the Marlins' 2014 22nd-round pick and a native of Vancouver, B.C., intrigues scouts with a power bat from the right side of the plate. He uses his hands well and gets the barrel on the ball, but timing issues cause his front side to drift a bit. He's got a strong frame and good bat speed but is a below-average runner.

Righthander Sati Santa Cruz earned an invitation to the Under Armour All-America Game at Wrigley Field in 2014 prior to his senior year at Tucson's Sahuarita High. After a lackluster end to his high school career, Santa Cruz went undrafted in 2015 and then passed on a commitment to hometown Arizona to pitch at Central Arizona.

He still has the frame and strong arm of a power pitcher, but scouts are concerned about Santa Cruz's conditioning and the fastball velocity that sat 87 to 90 mph in 2 2/3 innings out of the bullpen against Phoenix, down from the mid-90s heat he was packing earlier in his high school career. He wasn't repeating his delivery with a split spread front side. His size and power arm will keep Santa Cruz on the radar, but he needs to show more to garner draft interest this year.

The Central Arizona pitcher drawing most interest was their Friday night starter, Dakody Clemmer, a sophomore from Vancouver, Wash. The 6-foot-3, 205-pound righthander has the makings of two solid pitches, with plus life and movement on a running fastball up to 93 mph and a slider with some tightness and break. He uses a low-three-quarters delivery with some deception but struggled to repeat it later in his initial outing. He struck out three batters and held the the Bears to two runs in four innings.

Clemmer faced Phoenix College righthander Ryan Gowens, a 6-foot-4, 205-pound righthander from Deer Valley High School in Phoenix, in the season opener. Gowens struggled with his control, walking five batters in three innings, but has interesting tools. He has a sturdy pitcher's frame and a strong arm, but he throws with a wrap on the top side, giving him a funky arm action. The 91-mph fastball is a fairly straight pitch and he adds a hard slider. He's not yet a frontline prospect, but the frame and strength warrant keeping an eye on Gowens as the season progresses.

After hosting the annual Coyote Border Battle during the first weekend of the juco season, the JC of Southern Nevada hit the road for a pair of doubleheaders in Arizona against Gateway JC and South Mountain CC.

Sophomore righthander Gabe Gonzalez garnered significant scouting buzz at the Coyote Border Battle, showing a fastball

around 94 mph, reportedly touching 96, with good movement and carry to the arm-side, but he was sitting closer to 90 in the series against Gateway. At 6-foot-5, 220 pounds, Gonzalez owns a big league body and a loose arm, adding a decent hard breaking ball to his repertoire. Right now his control is below-average, but with a smidge of better command the twice-drafted Gonzalez could be shooting up draft boards later this year.

Righthanded freshman starter Mikey York, the son of former big league pitcher Mike York, may turn out to be the most interesting Coyotes hurler come draft time. Eighteen months removed from Tommy John surgery, he showed a fastball from 89 to 93 mph, a very good changeup with late depth, and a 12-to-6 curveball with downer action that flashes plus at times. York uses a clean delivery



Outfielder Mitchell Robinson transferred to Central Arizona JC for his sophomore season

but falls off at times throwing across his body, was up in the zone in his 2 1/3-inning outing

against South Mountain and allowed two runs on one hit and two walks.

Southpaw Sage Diehm, a native of Nampa, Idaho, passed on a commitment to North Carolina in order to play for Southern Nevada and be eligible for the 2016 draft. He's showing a slimmer frame than during his high school days, now checking in at an even 6-foot and 190 pounds.

Diehm sits in the high 80s and touches 90 with the fastball, and he adds a curveball from 74-77 mph and an 80 mph changeup. He also showed a good move to first base in his start against Gateway College, when he threw four scoreless innings before tiring in the fifth. He ended up taking the loss, allowing three runs in four innings.

The heart of the Coyotes lineup consists of a number of sizable hitters who can swing the bat, with one of the more impressive so far being Arkansas transfer Blake Wiggins, who splits time between third base, catcher and designated hitter. A 36th-round pick by Philadelphia in 2014, Wiggins has a strong 6-foot-1, 200-pound frame and decent bat speed, but struggles with offspeed pitches. In the first two weeks of his junior college career, he hit .269/.412/.462 with one home run.



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Gurriels' MLB entry may be delayed

SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

There was a buzz across the Dominican upon news that Yulieski Gurriel and younger brother Lourdes Jr. had fled the Cuban team at the Caribbean Series so they could each pursue a contract with a major league team.

Yulieski, 31, is the best player in Cuba. Baseball America ranked him as the No. 1 Cuban player still on the island last year in April, and now that he's hit .494/.586/.861 with just two (!) strikeouts in 215 plate appearances this season with 37 walks and 14 home runs, he's only further cemented his status as the country's top player.

Yes, his prime years are behind him—Gurriel first played for Cuba's top-level national team in 2003—but he's still an offensive force who can play good defense at third base and would be an option at second base as well, with the ability to step into the top or the middle of a major league lineup immediately.

Lourdes Jr. is 22 and would need time in the minors first. His lanky, long-armed frame and skill set make him a different type of player than Yulieski, without the same present ability or ultimate ceiling either, but he's a talented prospect who is going to draw plenty of attention.

He's mostly played left field this season in Serie Nacional, but he has experience at shortstop and third base (the position Yulieski played for their Industriales team in Cuba), so he's likely going to move back to the infield

when he works out for teams.

But if you're expecting the Gurriel brothers to sign and start playing games for an MLB team in 2016, you're probably going to be disappointed. The process for Cuban players to become eligible to sign takes several months, and in the case of Lourdes Jr., he is unlikely to sign anyway until October.

To be exempt from the international bonus pools, players must be at least 23 and have played five seasons in a foreign professional league, such as Cuba's Serie Nacional. Lourdes Jr. already has more than five seasons in Serie Nacional, but he doesn't turn 23 until Oct. 19.

Assuming Gurriel obtains competent representation, there is no way he is going to sign before Oct. 19. If he signs before then, he will be subject to the bonus pools. Not only will at least 10 teams be unable to sign him for more than \$300,000 (including the Dodgers, Cubs, Yankees and Red Sox) as a penalty for exceeding their bonus pools in previous years, but because his contract would surely break a team's pool, that team would have to pay a 100 percent tax on its pool overage.

That was the case when the Red Sox signed Yoan Moncada; the Red Sox paid the player a \$31.5 million bonus, then paid an additional \$31.5 million in tax to MLB. If Lourdes Jr. were to sign before Oct. 19, the commissioner's office would essentially be taking away half of his money.

By waiting until he turns 23 to sign,

Lourdes Jr. will be exempt from the bonus pools, freeing him to sign a major league contract (pool-eligible players have to sign minor league deals) and the team that signs him won't have to pay any taxes. And because any team can sign players who are exempt from the bonus pools—even the ones in the penalty box for exceeding their pools—all 30 teams could compete for his services.

Waiting for Oct. 19 to sign is a no-brainer. And, assuming he gets cleared to sign in time, he should sign between then and Dec. 1, which is when the Collective Bargaining Agreement expires. There are no guarantees about what will happen to international players in the next CBA, so it makes sense for him to sign before Dec. 1.

There is more uncertainty about when Yulieski will sign, but it certainly won't be before Opening Day; it might be after the all-star break and it might even be after the regular season ends.

While MLB no longer requires Cuban players to obtain a specific license from the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), there is still a bottleneck in the time between when players apply for free agency and when the commissioner's office clears them to sign.

In theory, the process should be simple enough. The commissioner's office has said that it is only looking to determine whether a player has residency that would make him subject to the draft or subject to the international signing system before clearing the player. That seems simple enough, yet the lag time can still take months, and with more Cuban players going through that process than ever before, that window might continue to grow.

So if Yulieski takes seven months to get cleared, that would make him a free agent in September. Should he sign then, he would need to get a visa and he would likely need some type of acclimation period to get back up to competitive game speed, even if he is facing live pitching leading up to his signing. At that point, we're talking about the very end of the 2016 season; he too might be looking at a 2017 debut.

For Lourdes Jr., he's still 22, with his best years ahead of him, so waiting until October won't hurt his career and it will strongly enhance his earning power. For Yulieski, who turns 32 in June, that potential loss of an entire year is more significant. They're both players worthy of the excitement they are going to generate, but fans likely are still a long ways from seeing them start their careers with a major league franchise.

—Ben Badler

Ohtani Draws A Crowd

PEORIA, ARIZ.

The Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters of Nippon Professional Baseball set up camp at the Padres' facility in Arizona, with exhibition games against Korean professional teams scheduled for the second week of their stay. In what's believed to be the first time an NPB team has held spring training in the U.S. in more than 30 years, the Fighters have brought nearly 100 players and coaches to Arizona.

Yet the majority of the attention from the hundreds of fans and mostly Japanese media observing the workouts was on one man. Shohei Ohtani, the 21-year-old sometimes referred to as "The Fastball Prince," is already a rock star wherever he goes. The 6-foot-3, 202-pound righthander is one of the most talented pitchers in the world after three seasons with the Fighters as well as appearances in November's Premier 12 tournament and



Yulieski Gurriel likely will be 32 years old before he makes his MLB debut

AUSON BOYER/RODE

the Japan All-Star Series against Major League Baseball stars in 2014.

Not only is Ohtani a dominant pitcher, he's also spent time in the Fighters' outfield. If major league teams ever get their wish and Ohtani makes the jump to MLB, he would almost certainly have to give up being a two-way player, but that doesn't concern him at this point. "I can't make that decision right now," Ohtani said through a team interpreter. "I'm going to try to be a two-way player . . . That's all I can say for now."

Ohtani nearly broke precedent in Japan when he considered signing with an MLB team out of high school. Instead, Ohtani will remain with the Fighters for the early part of his career. The opportunity to be a two-way player in Japan helped sway Ohtani to stay.

In his NPB career, the lefthanded-hitting Ohtani has slashed .245/.300/.429 with 18 home runs in 510 at-bats. During batting practice here, Ohtani showed a smooth swing with good extension from the left side, driving balls with excellent carry. Balls that didn't look like they were hit that hard were easily clearing the fence in both gaps.

Yet it's Ohtani's electric right arm that has generated so much buzz in the scouting community. His performance has improved each year, winning 15 games last season with a 2.24 ERA while fanning 196 batters in 161 innings. His fastball regularly registers in the upper 90s and has been recorded as high as 101 mph, tying the Japanese record set by former major leaguer Marc Koon. The fastball is the jewel of Ohtani's five-pitch repertoire. He most often complements the heater with a slider and splitter (what he calls his forkball) that reaches the low 90s, along with a changeup and curveball.

In two early February bullpen sessions, Ohtani showed a good, repeatable delivery from a high-three-quarters arm slot. He has a durable pitcher's frame that should be able to add strength. Ohtani said that he is working mostly on improving mechanics.

The big question is when Ohtani will follow in past Japanese pitchers' footsteps and jump to the majors. For that to happen, the Fighters would have to make Ohtani available through the posting system—with \$20 million the maximum release fee allowed—in order for teams to negotiate with Ohtani. As a potential frontline starter, there would be a frenzy of interest from major league clubs.

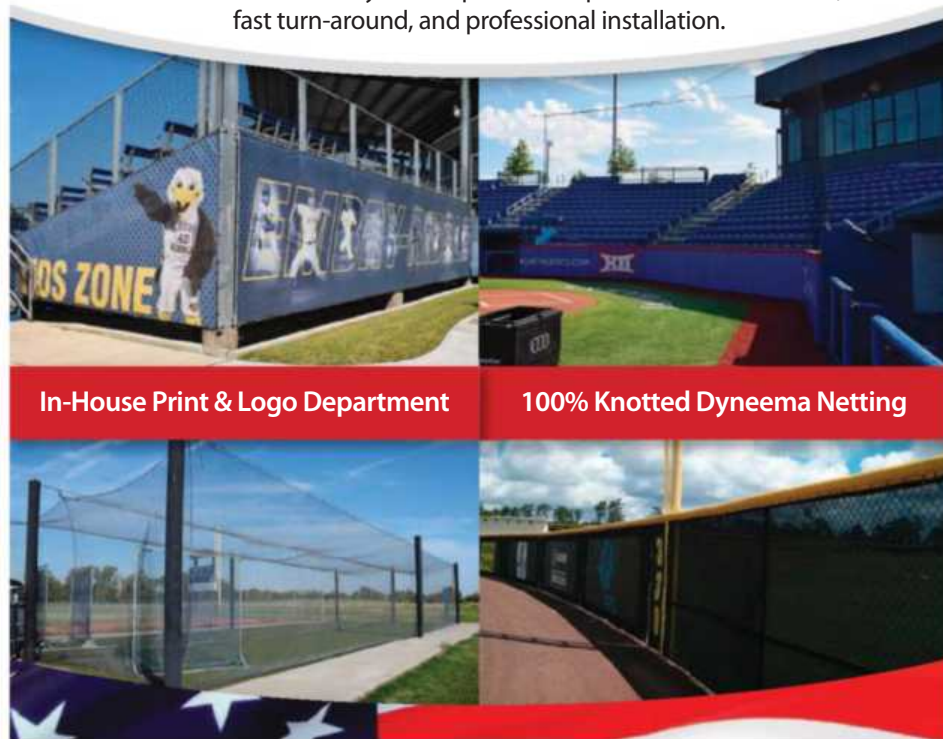
Ohtani indicated that a move to MLB is a possibility some day, but he knows that he's a Fighter for now and much of the process is out of his hands.

—Bill Mitchell

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Early returns have these bobbles at head of class

If you haven't noticed by now, we like to rank things here at Baseball America. We give you the top 30 prospects for each team, the top 20 in each league, the 500 best draft prospects, and the weekly shuffling of the best 25 college teams in the nation. In this issue alone, we have the annual Top 100 prospects and the top 50 high school programs in the country.

With that in mind, we here at Business Beat are going to get in on the fun. February in the minor league world is when teams start to get antsy and take to social media with countdowns of the days before the season opens. Bobbleheads are a favorite throughout the country, Baseball America headquarters included. So here are the top five bobbles set to be released during the upcoming season.

1. WILLIE 'MAYS' HAYES Akron RubberDucks (June 25)

Baseball fans' love of the "Major League" movie franchise is no secret. The original film is to Cleveland baseball as "Bull Durham" is to baseball in North Carolina's famous Triple-A city. So, on June 25, the RubberDucks, Cleveland's Double-A affiliate in the Eastern League, is honoring one of the film's most beloved characters, Willie "Mays" Hayes, with a doll of his own. The twist? Instead of his head, it's Hayes' legs that do the bobbling. Better get to Canal Park early for this promotion, because they're sure to go fast.

2. GREG BIRD Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders (June 3)

Bird had surgery to repair a torn labrum in his left shoulder, so fans in Scranton and the Bronx aren't likely to see him at all this season. That doesn't mean they can't take home a little piece of the slugging first baseman. On June 3, the RailRiders will give away a Bird bobblehead with a

unique twist. Instead of swinging a bat or fielding a ball or anything baseball-related, Bird is depicted hatching from an egg. Because, you know, he's Greg Bird. There have been dolls with bobbling bellies, bobbling legs and even ones with real, styleable hair, but this is the first known bobble featuring a mammal emerging from an egg. The doll won't help Bird heal any faster, but it will help salve fans' wounds while they wait for his return in 2017.

3. PORK ROLL, EGG AND CHEESE Lakewood BlueClaws (June 30, July 25, Aug. 17)

If one bobblehead is great, a set of three must be even better. In an homage to three of New Jerseyans' favorite foods, as well as Lakewood's three ever-dueling mascots, the Claws will give away a collectable set of three dolls. Pork Roll is up first on June 30, followed by Egg on July 25 and Cheese on Aug. 17. Whether you're a foodie or just a baseball fan, you'd be wise to collect all three of



Greg Bird won't play this season, but it won't stop the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders from handing out a Bird Bobblehead.

these trinkets. Because, really, what's pork roll and egg without cheese on top?

4. LARRY HOLMES Lehigh Valley IronPigs (May 3)

Philadelphia is known for, among other things, boxing. It was the setting for the universally beloved "Rocky" movie series, and a run up the 72 steps in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art is must-do for any tourist in the City of Brotherly Love. With that in mind, it's only right that the Phillies' Triple-A affiliate got in on the fun. On May 3, the Pigs will honor former heavyweight champion Larry Holmes with a bobblehead of his own.

Holmes, who grew up in Easton, Pa., just 20 minutes away from the IronPigs' home base of Allentown, won his first 48 fights (one shy of Rocky Marciano's heavyweight record) and held a championship belt from 1978-85. The bobblehead will be given to the first 3,000 adults through the gate, so get to the park early to have a fighting chance.

5. GIO GONZALEZ AND STITCH, DANNY ESPINOSA FU-MANCHU Potomac Nationals (Aug. 20, July 9)

The P-Nats this winter held their first fan's choice bobblehead contest. Fans were invited to submit their ideas, and the best eight were chosen for a vote. Of the finalists, which included a bobble llama (say that five times fast), Gio Gonzalez and his dog, Stitch, emerged victorious. Because the vote was so close, however, the team decided to produce the runner-up, too.

That would be Nats second baseman Danny Espinosa sporting the glorious Fu-Manchu mustache he wore last season. Sure, Espinosa had a season to forget, but his robust mustache deserved to be immortalized for future generations to marvel and admire for years to come. Thanks to the P-Nats, and Twitter user @NatsBobbles, who submitted the idea, that's exactly what will happen.

There will surely be more amazing bobbleheads revealed, but for now these five stand (bobble) head and shoulders above the rest.



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Transactions

Transactions involving minor league players, i.e. those not on 40-man rosters, covering the period Jan. 22-Feb. 4.

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS: Signed RHPs Kyle Bogese and Edward Concepcion. Traded RHP Chase Anderson, 2B Aaron Hill and SS Isan Diaz to Brewers for RHP Tyler Wagner and SS Jean Segura.

ATLANTA BRAVES: Signed C Blake Lalli.

BALTIMORE ORIOLES: Signed LHPs Chris Dwyer and Hideki Okajima, 3B Patrick Palmeiro and OF Jimmy Bosco. Traded RHP Jean Cosme to Padres for RHP Odrisamer Despaigne.

CHICAGO CUBS: Signed RHPs Tommy Nance and Jonathan Pettibone and LHP Nick Greenwood. Re-signed 2B Jonathan Mota. Released RHP Yoanner Negrin, LHP Carlos A. Rodriguez, 3B Carlos Jimenez and OFs Kevin Brown and Kevin Encarnacion.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX: Signed OF Vinny Rottino. Re-signed RHP Maikel Cleto.

CINCINNATI REDS: Signed LHP Jonathan Sanchez and 2B Angelo Gumbs.

CLEVELAND INDIANS: Re-signed C Alex Monsalve.

COLORADO ROCKIES: Re-signed OF Tyler Massey. Traded 3B Kevin Padlo and OF Corey Dickerson to Rays for RHP German Marquez and LHP Jake McGee.

DETROIT TIGERS: Signed RHP Willy Paredes and SSs Casey Frawley and Leonardo Laffita. Traded 3B Jeffry Marte to Angels for 2B Kody Eaves.

HOUSTON ASTROS: Signed RHP Carlos Sierra, LHP Wandy Rodriguez and SS Danny Worth.

KANSAS CITY ROYALS: Signed RHPs Bruce Kern and Peter Moylan.

LOS ANGELES ANGELS: Signed RHPs Yunesky Maya and Zach Nuding, LHP Jose Molina and SS Anthony Phillips. Released 3B Jose Herrera. Traded 2B Kody Eaves to Tigers for 3B Jeffry Marte.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS: Signed 2Bs Brandon Hicks and Drew Maggi. Re-signed RHP Chin-Hui Tsao.

MIAMI MARLINS: Signed LHP Jo-Jo Reyes, 1B Zach Lutz and OF David Sacaria. Re-signed 3B Don Kelly

MILWAUKEE BREWERS: Signed LHP Chris Capuano and 2B Fidel Pena. Re-signed LHP Cesar Jimenez. Released C Beau Wallace. Traded RHP Tyler Wagner and SS Jean Segura to Diamondbacks for RHP Chase Anderson, 2B Aaron Hill and SS Isan Diaz. Traded LHP Trevor Seidenberger to Padres for OF Rymer Liriano.

MINNESOTA TWINS: Signed OF Carlos Quentin.

NEW YORK METS: Signed C Raywilly Gomez and 2B Derrik Gibson. Re-signed C Jeff Glenn. RHP Carlos Torres elected free agency.

NEW YORK YANKEES: Signed RHP Tyler Cloyd, C Carlos Corporan, 3B De-ibinson Romero and OF Jared Mitchell.

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES: Signed LHPs Jeremy Bleich, Evan Crower and Edgar Ibarra and OF David Lough. Re-signed LHP Anthony Vasquez and 2B Tyler Henson. Traded LHP Jesse Biddle to Pirates for RHP Yoervis Medina.

PITTSBURGH PIRATES: Signed 3B Anderson Feliz. Traded RHP Yoervis Medina to Phillies for LHP Jesse Biddle.

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS: Signed LHP Bobby Wheatley and OF Carlos Peguero.

SAN DIEGO PADRES: Signed RHPs Trey McNutt and Seth Rosin and C

Hunter Redman. Released 1B Nick Evans. Traded RHP Odrisamer Despaigne to Orioles for RHP Jean Cosme. Traded OF Rymer Liriano to Brewers for LHP Trevor Seidenberger.

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS: Signed C Miguel Olivo and 3B Conor Gillaspie. Released RHP Alejandro Flores.

SEATTLE MARINERS: Signed C Steve Lerud, 1B Gaby Sanchez and SS Dayner Moreira.

TAMPA BAY RAYS: Signed RHPs Eddie Gamboa, Jeff Howell and Adam Reifer and OF Jaff Decker. Re-signed C Mayo Acosta. Traded RHP German Marquez and LHP Jake McGee to Rockies for 3B Kevin Padlo and OF Corey Dickerson.

TEXAS RANGERS: Signed RHP Carlos Fisher.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS: Signed RHPs David Aardsma, Oscar Brito and Meliton Reyes and 2B Maicer Izturis. Re-signed LHP John Anderson. Released 3B Trey Pascuzzi.

WASHINGTON NATIONALS: Signed RHP Bronson Arroyo, LHP Robert Fish, C Nick Rickles and SS Brendan Ryan.

Obituaries

Richard Brink, a third baseman who played one season in the minors in 1958, died Dec. 17, 2015, in Hartford. He was 79.

Hal Brown, a righthander who pitched 14 seasons in the big leagues from 1951-64, died Dec. 17, 2015, in Greensboro, N.C. He was 91.

Brown served in the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II and didn't get to the majors until he was 26 in 1951, when he came up with the White Sox. He worked mainly as a reliever early in his career with the White Sox and Red Sox but came into his own later after moving to a starting role with the Orioles. Brown was a regular in the Orioles' rotation from 1957-61, posting three straight double-digit win seasons form 1959-61. He had his best year in the majors in 1960, when he went 12-5, 3.06 in 159 innings. He wound down his career with stints with the Yankees and Astros, ending with an 85-92, 3.81 lifetime record in 358 big league appearances.

George Burpo, a lefthander who pitched one season in the majors in 1946, died Dec. 20, 2015. He was 93.

Burpo pitched seven seasons of pro ball, surrounding his service in World War II. He only reached the majors briefly, pitching in two games, both in relief, for the Reds in 1946.

Tom Byrne, who played in the minor leagues for one season in 1950, died Dec. 8, 2015, in Wilmore, Ky. He was 89.

Gene Conaway, a catcher who played four seasons in the minor leagues from 1959-62, died Dec. 11, 2015, in Covington, La. He was 74.

Nick DeMaio, who played two seasons in the minors in 1952 and 1954, died Dec. 6, 2015. He was 84.

Allen Draughon, who pitched professionally for one season in 1950, died Dec. 24, 2015, in Warsaw, N.C. His age was not available.

Rudy Escobar, an outfielder who played professionally from 1950-54 and in 1957, died Dec. 8, 2015, in Decatur, Ill. He was 88.

Gus Gil, a second baseman who played parts of four seasons in the majors between 1967 and 1971, died Dec. 8, 2015, in Phoenix. He was 76.

A native of Venezuela, Gil came up through the Indians and Reds organizations, first reaching the majors with Cleveland in 1967 and appearing in 51 games. He got his most extensive big league time two years later after being sold to the Seattle Pilots, hitting .222 with 17 RBIs in 221 at-bats. He appeared in 78 games over the next two seasons following the Pilots' move to Milwaukee. He played another five seasons in Triple-A through 1976 following his final stint in the majors in 1971.

Jack Gilbert, a righthander who pitched for two seasons in the minors



Conor Gillaspie returned to the Giants, the organization that made him the 37th overall pick in 2008

from 1949-50, died Dec. 17, 2015, in Macon, Ga. He was 87.

Clyde Hampton, an outfielder who played professionally for four seasons from 1958-61, died Dec. 2, 2015. He was 84.

Charles Hartz, who played one season in the minor leagues in 1950, died Dec. 9, 2015, in Connellsville, Pa. He was 84.

Phil Henderson, a lefthander who pitched five years in the minor leagues from 1963-67, died Dec. 15, 2015, in Little Rock, Ark. He was 71.

Evelio Hernandez, a righthander who pitched two seasons in the majors from 1956-57, died Dec. 18, 2015, in Miami. He was 83.

Hernandez pitched 11 seasons in pro ball, including a couple brief stints with the Washington Senators. The Cuban native first came up at the tail end of the 1956 season and went 1-1, 4.76 in 23 innings. He got into 14 games the following year, including two starts, and posted a 4.25 ERA in 36 innings without figuring in any decisions. He continued pitching professionally through 1967, ending his playing career with Monterrey of the Mexican League.

Harry Higgins, a righthander who pitched two seasons professionally from 1953-54, died Dec. 23, 2015. He was 81.

George Kaufman, a lefthander who pitched three years in pro ball from 1944-46, died Dec. 7, 2015. He was 91.

LaMont Lammers, a righthander who pitched in the minor leagues for one season in 1951, died Dec. 3, 2015, in Cedar Grove, Wis. He was 85.

Harry Land, a catcher who played professionally from 1940-43 and 1946-53, died Dec. 2, 2015. He was 93.

Bob Landeck, a righthander who pitched in the minor leagues for nine years from 1947-55, died Dec. 16, 2015, in Danforth, Ill. He was 90.

Ray Mathews, an outfielder who played in the minors in 1951, 1953 and 1955, died Dec. 20, 2015, in Marion, Pa. He was 86.

Richard Mauldin, a righthander who pitched four seasons in the minors from 1960-63, died Dec. 8, 2015, in Canton, Ga. He was 73.

Ryan McDermott, a righthander who pitched professionally from 1996-98, died Dec. 6, 2015. He was 37.

McDermott was a second-round pick of the Indians out of high school

in 1996 and pitched all three of his seasons in the Rookie-level Appalachian League.

James McGee, a righthander who pitched two seasons in the minor leagues from 1952-53, died Dec. 4, 2015, in Yuba City, Calif. He was 82.

Don Meier, who pitched one season in pro ball in 1946, died Dec. 11, 2015. He was 90.

Billy Ostrom, who played four seasons of pro ball from 1947-50, died Dec. 3, 2015. He was 95.

Ricky Pena, a shortstop who played one season in the minor leagues in 1977, died Dec. 2, 2015. He was 60.

Frederick Postolese, who played six years in the minor leagues from 1946-51, died Dec. 7, 2015, in Cheektowaga, N.Y. He was 91.

Bob Reaves, a shortstop who played professionally for three seasons from 1961-63, died Dec. 4, 2015. He was 76.

Clint Rogas, a righthander who pitched in the minor leagues in 1950 and from 1953-54, died Dec. 18, 2015. He was 85.

Bob Roxburgh, a righthander who pitched in the minors for one season in 1944, died Dec. 15, 2015. He was 94.

Bill Schambon, who played six seasons of pro ball from 1946-51, died Dec. 10, 2015. He was 90.


Don Schneider, a righthander who pitched in the minors for three years from 1952-54, died Dec. 24, 2015. He was 81.

Tookie Spann, an outfielder who pitched six years in the minor leagues from 1988-93, died Dec. 16, 2015, in Jackson, La. He was 48.

Ronald Williams, a righthander who pitched professionally from 1951-52 and 1955-56, died Dec. 16, 2015, in Rochester, Mich. He was 83.

Bob Willis, a righthander who pitched three years in pro ball from 1954-56, died Dec. 2, 2015, in Rockford, Ill. He was 80.

Obituary information provided by SABR. Information for minor league obituaries may be emailed to BaseballNecrology@gmail.com.








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Jayson Stark

Baseball Analyst,
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ESPN.com

PHILADELPHIA

I've been waiting a lonnnnggg time to write this column. For weeks. For months, actually. This column has become a Super Bowl tradition like no other.

In fact, it's become my favorite column of the year, if you want to know the truth. Why? Because there's no better time than Super Bowl week to punch a really enjoyable hole in the NFL's most widely accepted—but hilariously fictional—bit of institutional propaganda. Which is:

That in the awesome and sacred National Football League, anybody can win. (Ho, ho, ho.) . . . And every team has a chance. (Ha, ha, ha.) . . . And the landscape is totally level. (Guffaw, guffaw, guffaw.) . . . And parity rules. (Har, har, hardy, har, har.)

Oh, really? Tell it to the Browns.

Yeah, if only baseball could be more like football. If only baseball weren't a sport where (sing along with me) The Same Teams Win Every Year. If only baseball had a little parity, like the almighty NFL. If only . . .

Wait. What's that? The facts say that baseball actually whumps the NFL's posterior in the old competitive-balance mano a mano? Why, that's just shocking.

Or at least it's shocking to those of you who have been getting outraged by this column for a decade now. As if I'm just inventing phony facts to annoy you. Or because I cover baseball. Or because I feel like being a troublemaker one day a year.

Nope. That's not it. I promise. I'll even swear that everything you're about to read in this column is one giant bundle of truth, and pretty much nothing but the truth. These are real facts, researchable by one and all. So feel free. Research up a storm to try to prove otherwise. Good luck on that.

But in the meantime, here it comes—the eagerly awaited (except by Roger Goodell) Super Parity Bowl column, extra-special 2016 edition:

Did you know that Peyton Manning, Tom Brady and Ben Roethlisberger have been your AFC quarterbacks in 12 of the past 13 Super Bowls? And 13 of the past 15? Meanwhile, 143 other distinguished quarterbacks, from Drew Brees to Cleo Lemon, started a game in the AFC over those 15 years. And exactly two of them reached a Super Bowl (Joe Flacco and Rich Gannon).

That stat obviously says something about the greatness of Manning, Brady and Big Ben. But it says something about the competitive landscape of their sport, too. Right?

Ah, but I'm sure many of you out there are thinking that by focusing just on quarterbacks, I'm being misleading. Or



Terry Collins' Mets reached the World Series in 2015 for the first time since 2000, and they haven't won one since 1986

conspiratorial. Or just downright annoying. So let's get back to the real issue at hand.

It's Teams, Too

Have I mentioned (since last year) that the Broncos, Ravens, Patriots, Steelers or Colts are always in the Super Bowl? They're just five teams in a 16-team conference. But they've now represented the AFC in the Super Bowl for (ready for this?) 13 years in a row. Yep, 13. And 18 of the past 20.

So it's a good thing there's so much parity in the NFL. I'm sure that that's what's fueling all that hope in Jacksonville that the Jaguars are Super Bowl-bound any century now.

Since I spend most of my year honed in on baseball, I can actually tell you exactly which day I first started looking forward to writing this column. It was Oct. 15. That was the day we learned the identity of the final four playoff teams in a sport in which everybody knows The Same Teams Win Every Year. Those four teams were:

■ **The Royals**—who hadn't won a World Series since 1985 (30 years).

■ **The Mets**—who hadn't won since 1986 (29 years).

■ **The Blue Jays**—who hadn't won since 1993 (22 years).

■ **And the Cubs**—who hadn't won since Lincoln was president. All right, not really. I made that up. It was 1908 (107 years).

USELESS INFORMATION DEPT.

TRIVIALITY

It's only trivial if you don't know the answer.

In the past 10 seasons, 28 of 30 MLB teams made the playoffs. How many NFL teams made the playoffs in that period?

» **STILL MORE NFL:** For those who claim not having a salary cap means MLB teams have a great advantage over NFL franchises, here are more facts: Of the nine teams with the highest Opening Day payrolls this year, six of them missed the playoffs; Of the teams with the top 12 payrolls, just one (Toronto) won a postseason series, and of the teams with the top 15 Opening Day payrolls, none played in the World Series. And did you know that the Yankees and Dodgers have laid out a combined \$4 billion in salaries since 2004—and it's bought them an appearance in exactly one of the past 12 World Series?

TRIVIALITY ANSWER: 28 of 32 NFL teams made the playoffs, but the 120 playoff spots in football are 36 percent more than the 88 in baseball.

So that adds up to 188 title-free seasons. In a sport in which The Same Teams Win Every Year. Just thought I'd throw that out there.

But back in the NFL, the final four looked slightly more familiar. It comprised—whaddaya know—the top four seeds in the Anything Can Happen League. Just to put that in perspective, you want to know how often the four teams with the best records show up in baseball's final four? Glad you asked. The answer: precisely once in the entire wild-card era (in other words, the 21 seasons in which more than four teams made the playoffs).

But let's widen our perspective, simply because that's just as much fun. Twelve NFL teams made the playoffs in the Anything Can Happen League. A whopping eight of them had been there the year before, including the Packers, Seahawks, Steelers and Bengals.

So over the past six seasons, those four teams, plus the Broncos and Patriots, have made the playoffs a combined 31 times. And missed them just five times. Wow.

Imagine how often they'd get there if they played in a sport like baseball, where The Same Teams Win Every Year.

But wait. Maybe it's possible we have the Same Teams Win Every Year sports backward. Can't imagine how that happened.

And you want to know what else? To find the last season in which more than half the teams in the baseball playoffs were repeaters, you'd have to go all the way back to 2005.

Whereas it happens in the NFL pretty much every year. Hmmm. More pesky facts.

Gosh, I love facts.

They come in handy at times like this.

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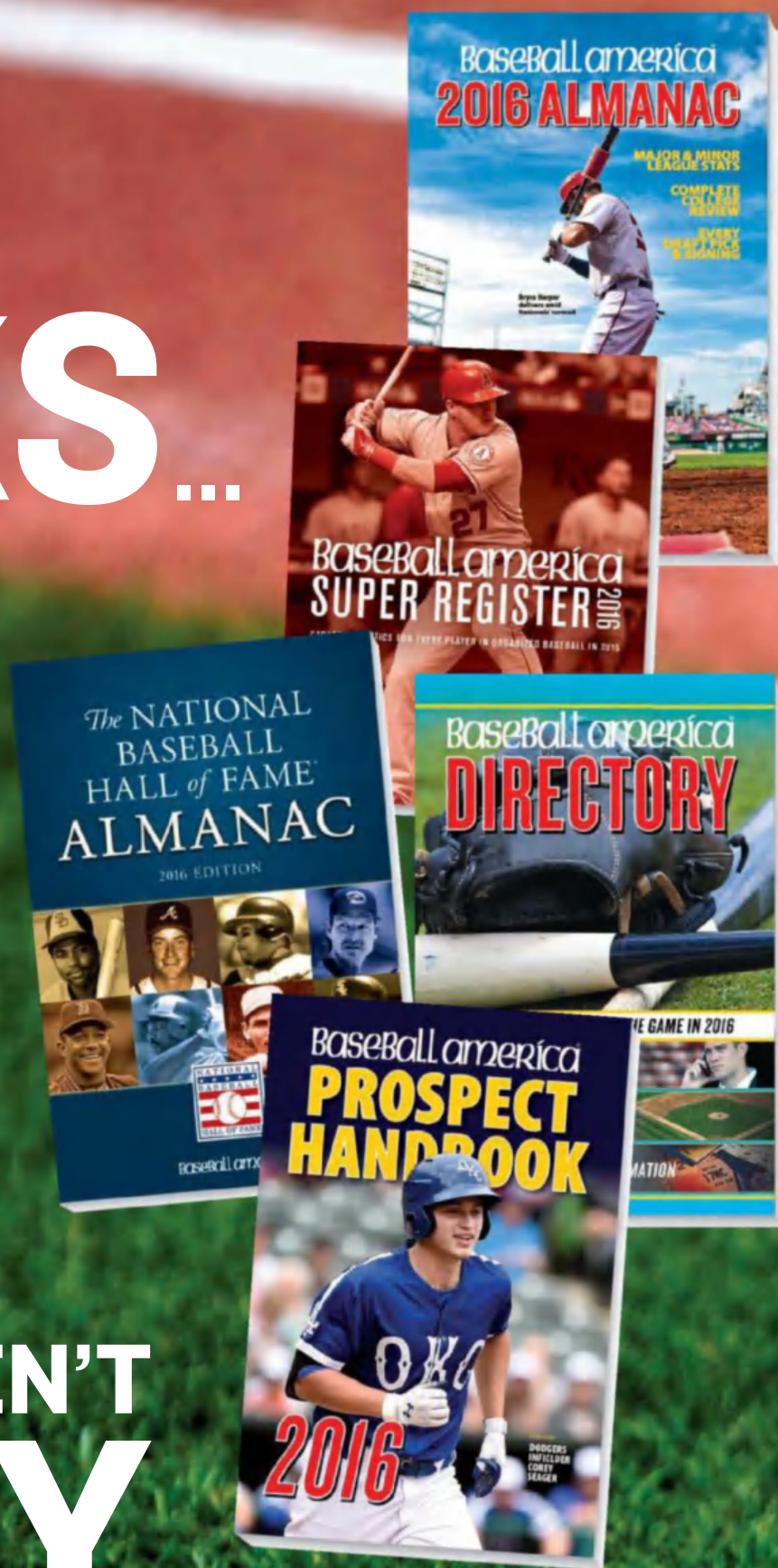
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